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About the Author

The Reverend Nathanael M. Guptill was born in Deer Isle, Maine. He received an A.B. degree from Colby College and a B.D. degree, *cum laude,* from the Andover Newton Theological School. While in college and seminary he served the Riverside Congregational Church, Vassalboro, Maine, the First Congregational Church in Salem, New Hampshire, and the First Congregational Church in Rowley, Massachusetts, in that order. He was ordained in Rowley in March, 1943, by the Essex North Association of Congregational Christian Churches and Ministers.

From 1943 until 1951 he served as Pastor of the First Congregational Church in South Portland, Maine. While he was there, the church increased its membership from 213 to more than 1,000 and added a large parish house wing to the meetinghouse. Mr. Guptill organized the men of the church in a "Fishermen's Club" for visitation evangelism whose activities figured largely in the rapid growth of the church.

Mr. Guptill also served the State of Maine as Chaplain of its School for Boys and Chairman of the State Parole Board for several years. He is a former Chairman of the Nominating Committee of the General Council of Congregational Churches, and is currently a Staff Correspondent for the *Christian Century* Magazine.

In 1951 he became Field Work Director at the Andover Newton Theological School. In this capacity he had charge of "on-the-job training" of 150 young ministers, by supervision of their work in churches and by classes in Church Administration and Pastoral leadership. Since 1954 he has been the minister of the First Church in Newton (Congregational) while remaining on the faculty of Andover Newton as Lecturer on the Christian Ministry.

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Christianity Does Make Sense

A Theology for Laymen

By

NATHANAEL M. GUPTILL

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Christianity
Does
Make Sense

Foreword

"Members of our church are expected to make up their own minds as to what they believe."

This is the answer many a layman receives when he begins to ask questions like, "What does our church stand for? What are the basic beliefs of our denomination?" It is a good answer as far as it goes, and the layman is usually willing to accept the responsibility it entails. Nobody wants slavishly to accept a body of doctrine just because it is handed out to him as a flag under which his church must fight.

Yet, if this is all the answer he gets, the average man in the average church is not satisfied. As one man put it, "When I go to Howard Johnson's after ice cream, I know I can pick my flavor, but I can't do it intelligently until I know what flavors there are. I need a menu. I don't know enough about Christianity to choose my flavor, because I don't even know what flavors there are."

Throughout Protestantism today there is a great ground swell of renewed lay interest and participation in organized Christianity. Many of the people expressing this renewed interest have not been to church regularly since they left home for college. They are told to read their Bibles, and with help they can learn to do this, but their first reaction is likely to be that of the Ethiopian steward who said, "How can I understand it except somebody explain it to me?" (Acts 8:31). They may be handed a book by one of today's great theologians, but the language and terminology which theologians use when they talk to one another will stump the average man in the pew.

This book is based on the conviction that Christianity *does* make sense, that its great basic assumptions can be

outlined in the language of the people. It is said of Jesus that "the common people heard him gladly" (Mark 12:37). The gospel he brought with him is a gospel for everybody. As a matter of fact, he found himself equally at home with scholars like Nicodemus or with the unlettered masses on the hilltop in Galilee.

We are not trying here to tell people what they ought to believe. We are trying to tell, to those who would like to know, what Christians have believed down through the ages. This book aspires to be no more than a roughly sketched outline of the few essential teachings of the Christian faith. The details must be filled in by each disciple for himself.

It is our hope that those who read these pages at the beginning of their Christian pilgrimage may be started thereby on a voyage of discovery. The Scriptural references are meant to be a help in this discovery; so the book should be read with the Bible (preferably the Revised Standard Version) at hand for frequent reference.

Perhaps those who open it after years of discipleship may find concepts in the faith they did not know were there. If a brother minister should find here an illustration or an outline for a sermon he is welcome to it.

The questions for discussion appended to the chapters suggest that the book may be used as a text for a class preparing adults for church membership or for any five-session adult class in doctrine.

If it should be noticed that some fundamental presuppositions here expressed are similar to those taught by Nels F. S. Ferré, this is not a coincidence and is mentioned with affection and gratitude.

—Nathanael M. Guptill

1 *The Christian Follows Christ*

Jesus said, "... I am the way, the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me."

—John 14:6

We begin with Jesus. Why? We begin with Jesus because the Christian is Christ's man. About all the other aspects of the Christian commitment we argue with one another. We argue about who Jesus is. We argue about many other doctrines. But in this one thing all Christians are united—each in his own way, we know we ought to follow Christ.

Why don't we begin with God? We don't begin with God because there are many who believe in God who are not Christians. Followers of Mahomet and Buddha believe in God, but there is a great difference between their respective ideas of God and that of Jesus. The New Testament tells us that there is far more to religion than belief in God, for "even the devils believe in Him and tremble." We can't begin with God because we can't understand God until we know Jesus Christ.

Why don't we begin with the Bible? We will get to the Bible (and to God) in due time, but the Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, is always prior even to the Word writ down, for we cannot understand the latter without the former.

So, when we begin to talk about Christianity we begin where Christianity began in history and where it begins in us. We begin with Jesus.

This is not surprising, for all truly earth-shaking religions have belief in a person at their center. Ideas have truth and power in them, but truth and power don't go into action until they become incarnate in a living person. This is because there is nothing so precious or powerful in life

as the relationship of one person to another. Firemen fight any fire with skill and vigor. But let it be known that a child is trapped on the top floor of the burning building and they fight with fury and heroism. Ask a man to don a plumed hat and strut down the street and he will defy you to make him. But make him a member of a group of men whose custom it is to don plumed hats and strut down the street together and he will pawn the family silver to buy the plumed hat.

Americans are prone to ridicule the British for maintaining the monarchy as the symbol of their national unity. "A flag is much cheaper and accomplishes the same purpose," we are likely to say. But we are wrong. It is much easier to generate and maintain loyalty to a queen who lives a real life of uprightness and devotion than it is to stimulate love for a piece of bunting, be it ever so hallowed. The relationship of husband to wife, parent to child, friend to friend, and of follower to leader all bear witness to the fact that the most important things in life are the loyalties between persons which are generated by mutual faith and hope and love.

Judaism, Hinduism, and Confucianism are primarily religions of ideas and customs. They exert great influence over their adherents and display great survival powers, but they do not reach out and transform the world around them. It was the followers of Mohamet, Allah's personal prophet, on the other hand, who successfully fought off the Crusades and nearly overran Europe in the last days of the Middle Ages.

We can see this principle borne out by comparing Christianity with the aggressive political religions of our day. The idea of "superman" belonged to the 19th century philosopher Nietzsche, but it didn't create any great stir until it became incarnate in Hitler. Then it was transformed into a movement of screaming thousands who almost attained their avowed purpose of conquering the

world. Karl Marx was a thinker, not a great leader. His ideas rested safely between the covers of books or in the heads of little knots of intellectuals until Lenin brought them to life and, by becoming their prophet, made them into a world revolution that is the Christian's number one challenge today.

So it is with Christianity. Often we hear it affirmed that all the basic ideas of Christianity are to be found in Hebrew and Greek literature, that Christianity brings no new thought to the world. And, with one exception that we shall discuss later, this is true. The newness and power of Christianity are not in a new idea but in a new kind of person, Jesus Christ. Here is the beating heart of Christianity, the focus of faith, the source of power—the Person at the center of history, Jesus of Nazareth.

Jesus Christ is the source and goal of the total Christian experience

When the Apostle Paul said, "For me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21), he was not speaking in riddles or in poetry. He was describing the Christian life as he knew it and as millions since have lived it.

The perfect description of what Christianity is to the Christian is to be found in the text printed at the head of this chapter. It came from Jesus, almost casually, at his last meeting with his disciples before the crucifixion. He had just said, "... when I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and take you to myself, that where I am there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going" (John 14:3 ff.). At this moment we can almost see the apostles nodding wisely one to another, none of them having the slightest idea what he was talking about, all of them unwilling to admit it—all except Thomas, that is. Thomas, as honest as he was bewildered, said, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and

the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." This is how religion works for the Christian. For Thomas, for Peter, for Paul, for us in this latter day, this is the key to Christian living, the pattern of Christian life.

Jesus, for the Church and for the Christian, is *the way, the truth,* and *the life.*

This becomes apparent according to a pattern established by the philosopher, Hegel, which, while profound in its implications, is quite easy to understand. Hegel believed that reality is to be understood not as something dead and stationary, but as something alive and moving. Thus, everything that happens is the result of the interaction of complementary forces. The forces which act upon one another Hegel called *thesis* and *antithesis.* The result of their interaction he called *synthesis.* The ongoing of all experience can be described in terms of a thesis attacked by an antithesis which together with it forms a synthesis.

The simplest illustration of the truth of this concept is in the matter of seeing. We all know that we cannot see in the dark. But we do not always remember that we cannot see in total light, either. The sun blinds us when we look directly into it just as effectively as if we were deep in Mammoth Cave with the lights turned off. We must have both light and darkness struggling with one another before our eyes if we are to see. Sight (synthesis) equals light (thesis) plus darkness (antithesis).

The principle is just as true as a description of life on the physical, mental, and spiritual planes. We must have food to live physically, but if we eat all the time and exercise not at all we die of obesity. We must have exercise, we must spend our food in activities if we are to live. But, again, if we exercise with hard work day after day without food we die, also. Physical life (synthesis) results from a balanced and ordered struggle between food (thesis) and exercise (antithesis). Mental wisdom is the fruit of study counterbalanced by expression in speaking, writing, and

living. Spiritual depth in life comes from faith plus works, prayer plus deeds. All life is the result of the interaction of complementary forces working upon one another as light and darkness mingle to make sight possible. Hegel applies this principle to history, to nature, and into all realms of knowledge, but for our purposes this brief exposition is sufficient.

It is in this manner that Jesus, *the way,* and Jesus, *the truth,* combine in a disciple to create in him the full Christian *life.* Our Lord is first *the way.* Lost in the mires of sin and doubt we hear the voice of one who speaks with assurance, and we follow in his steps, not knowing where, because we believe in him. But then as we follow, listening to his words and beholding his mighty acts, our questing minds catch a glimpse of Who and whence he is. When this has happened, we have mounted the second step and our Lord has become to us *the truth,* the Interpreter of all that was and is and is to be. These are the two poles of Christian experience: *the way* and *the truth,* following and learning, working and worshipping, doing and knowing. When both have been established in life they act upon one another like Hegel's *thesis* and *antithesis,* and the end product, the *synthesis* of the two, is the full-fledged Christian *life* known only to the saints.

The pattern becomes clearer when applied to actual lives in which it appears. We shall first apply it to the apostles Peter and Paul, Peter first.

Peter follows Jesus, the way

When Jesus came upon Simon with his brother Andrew by the shore and bade them follow him, he made no doctrinal conditions to their discipleship. He didn't ask them if they believed in the Trinity or the Incarnation or the Atonement. He didn't even ask them if they believed in God, although doubtless he knew that they did. Rather, he offered them an inducement, "Follow me and I will

make you become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17). When Simon laid down the net he was repairing and took the first step towards Jesus that day it was not because of any understanding he had of the basic ideas of Christianity. He may have met Jesus briefly in the company of John the Baptist, but certainly his understanding of our Lord's role in the purpose of God was nil. Simon left his nets and followed because he saw in Jesus a man in whom he could believe as a person. He started in that moment upon *the way*. It is true that the hunger in his soul to see the redemption of Israel foretold by the prophets had something to do with his decision. Other men were pushed toward Jesus by other hungers. But for Simon and for the others this primary act of Christian faith is not the espousal of a doctrine but the acceptance of a personal invitation. At first, it is not belief in a teaching, but belief in a teacher. At first, it is not acceptance of *the truth*. It is, at first, setting out upon *the way*. Simon believed in Jesus the way a man believes in his wife, his family physician, his favorite teacher, his own minister, his best friend. He believed that Jesus was good enough and powerful enough to merit his highest allegiance. This is the initial act of discipleship, and at first this is enough.

So Simon followed and in due course became Peter. It was a hard and often baffling experience, this business of following the Master. He often did just the things Peter thought he ought not to do, and more often than not his teachings were in parables that even his best friends could not understand. But always there was this relationship of personal faith that became deeper and warmer as the months went by, faltering now and then in hours of confusion, but always returning in fuller measure than ever in moments of prayer and hours of fellowship. This personal relationship, which bound Master and disciple together in mutual faith and love, was sun and rain to the seeds of *the truth* that began to sprout and grow in Peter's mind.

Peter discovers Jesus, the truth

Then came the revelation. Nobody can tell just how many months Peter and his friends had followed Jesus as *the way* before it could come, but it was many, many months. John the Baptist had made his final witness and become a martyr. The twelve had been chosen and sent out on their mission. Days of preaching and teaching and healing, and many rocky miles of Palestinian roadway lay behind them. Then the day of illumination came. Jesus was alone with the twelve in a remote and lonely place. He asked them, "Who do the people say that I am?" (Luke 9:18 ff.). And they answered, "John the Baptist; but others say, Elijah; and others, that one of the old prophets has risen." And he said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" And Peter answered, "The Christ of God."

It would be folly to claim that this confession was brand-new in Peter's mind. Perhaps it had been a suspicion that first day when he left his nets to follow the Master. But as a deep possessing conviction it was new this day. *The truth* had now invaded Peter's mind as *the way* had long ago invaded his will, and Jesus said it was God, not man, who had made it known to him. Whereas before he had a faith *in* Jesus, now he also had a faith *about* Jesus. The two poles of Christian experience were now established in him as Peter mounted the second step toward sainthood.

Peter finally knows Jesus, the life

But the apostle was still a long way from his goal. *The way* and *the truth* do not immediately combine to make the Christian *life* in the way that oxygen and hydrogen combine to make water. Theirs is a long and perilous interaction, more often than not incomplete in this life. For Peter it was not easy. Matthew and Mark testify that only a few moments after *the truth* came from his lips his Lord rebuked him as a servant of Satan for suggesting that he, Jesus, evade the cross. We are led to believe that even the

climatic experience of the Transfiguration a week later was a complete mystery to him at the time. But still, Peter had begun to live on a new and higher level. In spite of the bungling impulsiveness that led to many errors and even to the denial of his Lord in the hour of his trial, Peter did arrive. *The way* and *the truth* of Jesus Christ mingled in Peter's groping soul until the day came when he could lend his tongue to the Holy Spirit in the conversion of three thousand on the Day of Pentecost, could stand in the Council Chamber and defy the rulers of Israel to their beards, could even (good Jew that he was) affirm to the Gentile, Cornelius, "God has shown me that I should not call any man common or unclean" (Acts 10:28).

Peter, like Hamlet, is Everyman. In him were all the weaknesses and foibles to which we are all so prone. We can see our striving and our failing in him as in a mirror. Therefore, it is all the more significant that this man, this vacillating Simon, should by the power of God in Christ Jesus become Peter, valiant Fisherman of the early Church. Because Jesus was to him *the way* and *the truth,* Peter was able to fulfill the highest destiny of mortal man, to achieve *the life* in this same Christ.

Paul also finds Christ, the way, the truth, and the life

And now what about Paul? Does he fit the pattern or does he set a new pattern all his own? We turn to him purposely because his Damascus Road experience has been regarded by many as the prototype and epitome of Christian conversion (which well it may be). We have implied that what is called *conversion* is an initial commitment to Jesus as a person, *the way,* but that the full Christian *life* is not born full-grown at that instant. Rather, it grows in the good soil of the fellowship of which Jesus is the Head through the interaction of this commitment of the will with a growing *truth* awareness in the mind. Maybe we are here talking about what some would call *sanctification* as a

second necessary step towards the Christian life as lived by true saints. There are those who would affirm that Paul leapt all at once from the status of Christ's mortal enemy to the status of full-fledged sainthood. Certainly nothing we can say can detract from the dramatic abruptness of what happened that hot day in the middle of the road. But if we examine the record we will see that the three-fold pattern of *the way, the truth,* and *the life* was as much a part of Paul's experience as it was a part of Peter's.

Saul's calling on the road to Damascus was just as much a personal summons as was Simon's by the lakeside. He was called aside from the course his life was taking and invited by Jesus Christ to be his disciple. In this moment he, too, recognized the Master as good enough and powerful enough to merit his complete personal allegiance. He was shown that this one who had died on the cross had been raised by God to confound the value judgments of men. And he was convinced that the hunger of his heart (for freedom from sin and death) might be satisfied in him. In that experience of confrontation with Jesus, Saul, like Simon before him and millions after him, made his commitment to follow Christ as *the way.*

But what about *the truth* as a factor in Paul's experience? Did he, as the author of Acts (9:20) tells us, immediately go to the Damascus disciples with his astonishing new doctrine, "He is the Son of God"? Or is he telling the truth in Galatians (I:16-17) when he says, "I did not confer with flesh and blood... but I went away into Arabia"? The latter would seem the more likely, that just as Jesus went into the wilderness to confer with God on the meaning of his baptism, so his disciple, Paul, went away by himself to seek *the truth* in fellowship with his new-found Lord. But regardless of chronology the basic pattern is there. Paul's first commitment was a commitment of personal loyalty to the Person who confronted him on the Damascus Road. Whether *the truth,* which had undoubtedly been incubat-

ing in his fertile mind for months, came to him immediately or after continued fellowship with Christ is unimportant. Paul's *life* as a Christian saint was a result of his following Christ as *the way* and then discovering him as *the truth.*

Here it may be well to note that some people are "doctrinally minded" and others are not. The *way* factor in Peter's experience was a great deal more important to him than the *truth* factor. For Paul, the first Christian theologian, the *truth* was of almost equal import. There are Christians today whose lives emphasize one or the other of these essential elements, but both elements have to be present if the full Christian *life* is to be lived.

The Church, too, grew spiritually from way *to* truth *to* life

The pattern of Christian growth which we discern in the lives of the apostles is also evident in the story of the birth and infancy of the Church as an institution. It is significant to note that after the end of Jesus' earthly ministry the disciples were known to one another and to those outside the fellowship as "Comrades of *the Way.*" In the beginning there were no hard-and-fast doctrines, and what doctrines there were often did not stand the test of time. Many at first believed that Jesus' Second Coming was to be within their own lifetime. Many others believed that the Christian movement was to be a refined kind of Judaism, subject to all the dietary and other regulations of the Pharisaic Code. The one thing the early disciples had in common was their mutual experience of friendship with Jesus. They were his. They had met him before and after his death. (We shall have more to say about the Resurrection in the last chapter.) They knew the power of his personality to change lives because their own lives had been changed by him. They didn't have any real common understanding of what this meant except that, in Jesus, God had made a unique foray into human history. But they knew

it was wonderful and that it made life joyous and victorious for them. The love of Jesus they had received and now shared with one another was enough to keep them together and make others long to belong to the same Lord. The Church began by following Jesus as *the way.*

But the Church had not been going for a month before its members began arguing about the real significance of the experience they had had with Jesus. If it is any comfort to disheartened survivors of latter-day church fights, let it be said that as long as there has been a Church there have been disputes among the members as to *the truth* about who Jesus was and what he did. While today the discussion may be about how far into politics the Church should go, or whether denominations should merge or not, or which churches are really churches and which are beyond the pale, the early arguments were on other matters: Does one have to abide by the Jewish Torah to be a Christian? When is Christ coming again? Is Paul an apostle or just a bossy meddler?

Yet, as these arguments went on, great common convictions began to appear. As the disputes waged back and forth the discussion kept coming back to certain themes again and again, until in A.D. 325 at Nicaea in Greece a creed was drawn up which nailed down a body of doctrine still affirmed by the great majority of Christians. The Church, like Peter and Paul and the others, had discovered what for her was *the truth* of Jesus Christ. It would be folly to pretend that at that time or at any time since then everybody in the Church believed the same thing, or that everybody recited the Nicene Creed with equal enthusiasm for each affirmation. We will not discuss the creed as such although we will cover the central doctrines to which it holds. The point we make here is that the two poles of Christian experience, first Christ, *the way,* and then Christ, *the truth,* were established early in the life of the Church as an institution, and her life since that time has seen the

same interplay and mingling between the two as is evident in the lives of the members themselves. That she has not yet achieved the full and perfect realization of the Christian *life* is, alas, quite evident. But she goes on toward this goal whenever and insofar as Jesus is *the way* and *the truth* for her.

Today Jesus remains the way, the truth, and the life

Now, if we come down to the present day, we shall see that this same pattern is still in force in the life of the modern Christian.

As it was with Simon, the first step towards God for you and for me is a leap of faith in Jesus Christ as a person good enough and powerful enough to merit our complete personal allegiance. The Department of Evangelism of the National Council of Churches publishes a decision card on the basis of which thousands of people unite with the Church each year. This card sets forth the following affirmation to be signed by the prospective disciple: "I believe in Jesus Christ and purpose with his help to live a Christian life." Simon and Saul didn't sign decision cards, but their initial commitment to the Master could have been phrased in those words. Many earnest people who make this decision have deep misgivings about some of the affirmations of the creed, if, indeed, they know the creed at all. Their theological premises for the intellectual part of their decision might be as different as were these of Simon and Saul (and, believe us, these two were not of one mind). The important thing is that a commitment of the will has been made in answer to the eternal invitation of Jesus Christ. He, in this moment of decision, becomes for the new disciple ***the way.***

Then, after walking *the way* for months or years under the personal guidance of the Master and in fellowship with other disciples, he begins to catch glimpses of *the truth.* As did Simon before him, he finds it harder and harder to

explain a life like that of Jesus in any human terms, and by sudden illumination or by gradual conviction he comes to see that the things the Church has believed for 2,000 years are not as fantastic as they seemed to him at first. What began as a commitment of the will in loyalty to a person at last becomes also a commitment of the mind to belief in a doctrine. It probably is not the whole compass of Christian theology any more than it was for the apostles. But, in his own way, the 20th-century disciple also lays hold of Jesus as *the truth.*

After this, *the life* in Christ begins to grow in stature. Because of the illumination of *the truth* his commitment to *the way* becomes stronger and more confident, and at all times his relationship to his Lord grows richer and more real.

Here we would like to tie our terminology once more to the traditional concepts of *conversion* or *regeneration.* How does our teaching here stand up to the traditional demands that to be a Christian one must be *converted* or *born again?* We maintain that when a person says yes to Jesus Christ and follows him as Simon did by the lakeside as *the way,* he is indeed *converted* or *born again.* When a factory is *converted* from production of automobiles to production of tanks it abruptly drops one purpose for being and espouses another. Simon was so *converted* when he stopped fishing for fish and began with Jesus to fish for men. In the same sense, when a man ends one kind of life as if he had died and begins a new kind of life completely different from the old he is *born again.* Saul had this experience on the Damascus Road when Saul the persecuter died and Saul the disciple was born. Those who maintain that it is impossible to sin again after conversion or regeneration are talking about something that exists only in imagination. The greatest saints would be the first to testify that sin returns again and again. But Jesus, *the way,* gives new weapons with which to overcome and resist. And

the pilgrimage via *the way* and *the truth* to *the life* is the journey of *sanctification* first trod by Christ himself for the sake of his disciples.

The concepts we have set forth open up a whole host of observations concerning the Church of our day. It becomes immediately apparent that there are some churches that are so far from anything resembling this experience as to merit the adjective, "Christless." It is also true that—for most of the churches of America, at least—a great many of the members are only *way* Christians who grope without too much success for *the truth,* which is either ignored or made so complicated as to be incomprehensible by those whose job it is to proclaim it. Also, there are churches where *the truth* is parroted in all its minutiae, but where *the way* is omitted altogether. This kind of short-circuited religion is the worst of all, not only because it is false and ineffectual but because it makes the real thing unavailable. Those who espouse it are prevented by their own pride from knowing the Master who hides behind the doctrines about him, and those outside are deceived into thinking that this is what Christianity really is.

Notwithstanding all these negative factors, it is yet true that the influence of Jesus is still the most important fact of our day. In the midst of the atomic age the disciples of our Lord still cling to him and do the work he bids them do. In every nation under the sun there gather for worship and fellowship and service those to whom Jesus is still *the way* and *the truth* and *the life.* These constitute in their togetherness the life of God in the world of men.

Christ must come first in the life of every Christian

At the risk of laboring the point of the centrality of Jesus in his own religion, we would issue a warning against specific perils. It is a diabolical fact that often the very things that should strengthen our relationship to our Lord are the things that get in the way.

The Church is the garden in which Christian experience grows. Without it the plant of Christianity would not have survived. More than this (to jump to a very different figure of speech) we will discover in a later chapter that the Church is the very Body of Christ, without which his great spirit has little if any bearing on the world of actuality. But sometimes, as sour soil can kill the very seeds entrusted to it or as a diseased or stricken body can shut out its own spirit, the Church can become the enemy of her own Christ.

The Bible, as we shall see, can be the very Word of God. Without it the Gospel has no definiteness or authority. Indeed it is impossible to imagine a Christianity apart from the Bible. Yet there have been times when the letter of the Book has stifled the very Word it was commissioned to proclaim, when the Holy Book has been used by unholy men to contradict the message of God.

The deepest desires of our own hearts are perfectly fulfilled in Christ. But we are ignorant as to what our true desires are, and we have in us, as part of our mortality, a proud and rebellious spirit unwilling to see realities we do not want to exist. Our own deep ambition, the desire for life and freedom which at last can lead us to seek for heavenly treasure, usually becomes demonic at first, leading us to resent and reject the divine obedience in which alone true freedom can be found.

Christ is over the Church

There are at least two ways in which the Church can get in the way of the real Christian *life*. One is common in the Roman Catholic Church, the other is common in the Protestant Church.

Roman Catholic teaching holds that it alone has "the keys of the kingdom" committed to the Apostle Peter by Jesus Christ. Few will deny that for many millions of good people the Church of Rome has been the door to the

Christian *way,* and *truth,* and *life.* But the corrupting nature of power is such that in claiming to be the only doorway to Christ the Roman Church has often stood between the disciple and his Lord.

The leaders of the Roman Church have been shown by history to be no more infallible than the leaders of any other Church, and often they have confused their own political power and material wealth with the goals of Jesus. They have hardened the vital personal relationship to the Master, which is the right of every disciple, into a mechanical system of rites, rubrics, and recitations which can become ends in themselves. And whenever this happens, the Church, which should usher the believer into the presence of Christ, instead stands between him and his Lord, offering the stones of institutionalized religion instead of the true bread of firsthand personal faith.

Loyalty to the Church and devotion to Jesus are not necessarily the same thing. The latter is the main business of life, the former is incidental and instrumental. Later, when we discuss the Church, we will see how essential her role is, how hard it is for Christian experience to survive outside her—if, indeed, it is ever possible. Nevertheless, the Church is at best only a part of the gospel, the vessel in which the treasure is found, the soil in which the living seed grows. Christ himself is always Lord of his Church and first before her in the allegiance of his people.

Closely akin to this Roman pitfall is the Protestant tendency towards a Christless Church. As Church life has passed its low point in the current cycle and shows more and more organizational activity, Protestantism as a movement has really begun to hum in many areas. Usually, when the church building is painted, and the church school is crowded, and the ladies aid turns out good works as fast as Detroit turns out automobiles, it is an indication that somewhere in this maelstrom there is real spiritual vitality. These things occur when the followers of Jesus really get

excited about their mission and band together in his name to do something about it. But Church activity is not an absolutely certain sign of Christian vitality. It has happened that a group of nominal Christians, believing that the Church to which they belong is an end in itself, has made of the institution another human agency for human fellowship without the binding relationship to God in Jesus which is the main business of Christian life. A warning sign of this living death appears when gradually the organizations begin to omit worship and study from their programs, and when the bean suppers and bazaars draw more people in attendance than does the Sunday morning service. If Christ is first in the life of the Church then organizational activity is healthy and good. It means the friends of Jesus are also friends of one another, and are gathered not only for worship and study, but also for service and fellowship. But when the Church as an institution comes first before its Lord, then the Master gets pushed farther and farther to one side until he is finally shut out altogether. Protestant as well as Roman churches must put Christ first or they are not real churches at all.

Christ is over the Bible

Almost all Christians regard the Bible as "God's Word." It is in interpreting what this means that the faithful of different labels disagree. We have no quarrel to make in the academic discussion as to whether the Bible is "verbally inspired" or a "progressive revelation," if indeed these terms necessarily conflict. The important question to us is, "How does the Bible contribute to real Christianity; how does the Book foster the relationship of men and mankind to Jesus?" Regardless of the outcome of more abstract discussions we hold that to given people in specific moments the Bible has been "God's Word" because in it God has spoken to them through the written page. It is likewise true that in other moments for other people (or the same

ones) the Bible has been something else—either because of ignorance or sin. We think you will acknowledge this, too, after a quick look at pertinent events in the lives of actual people.

After his baptism Jesus went into the wilderness for more than a month to pray and meditate. At the end of that time, with marvelous understatement, the story tells us, "He was hungry" (see Luke 4). In the haze of his exhaustion he saw the round stones of the desert place and they looked like loaves of bread. The voice of temptation came to him, "Why don't you turn these stones into bread and be hungry no longer?" Then it was that the Bible came to his rescue. Up out of his memory, where, at his mother's knee in Nazareth or at the neighborhood synagogue school, they had been tucked carefully away in his childhood, came the words of Deuteronomy, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." In that moment the Bible spoke to Jesus, but in it God spoke to him, too, rescuing him from temptation.

The story of St. Augustine's conversion is another case in point. Like most of the great saints, Augustine had a terrific struggle with himself before saying yes to the call of Christ. He had a concubine, and his Christian commitment involved for him a complete change of ideals, interests, friends, and goals. The battle within him was often in doubt and always a torture to his mind. Then one day in his garden he heard a voice say, "Take, read; take, read." He opened the copy of the Epistle to the Romans which lay nearby at random and these words leaped out at him, ". . . not in reveling and drunkenness, not in debauchery and licentiousness, not in quarreling and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to gratify its desires" (Romans 13:13-14). Here again it was the Bible speaking, but in that moment God spoke to Augustine through the Bible. His resistance melted, and he became Jesus Christ's man. He had, by the words of the

Book, been confronted with the call of the Master, and he accepted that call.

Sherwood Eddy exhibits a little, tattered YMCA New Testament which has a thrilling story. It seems that in Korea many years ago a group of political prisoners were housed together in a big room from which a few were taken out and shot each day. One of these prisoners, a pagan, in contemplating his death, asked that a New Testament be brought to him. His request was granted, and he passed the hours, while waiting for the moment when his name would be read from the execution list, by reading the gospel. It turned out that the fortunes of Korea's internal struggle changed, and this man was not executed after all. He became a Christian. His name is Syngman Rhee, and he gave Sherwood Eddy the Testament as a witness to the fact that God often speaks to men through the Bible.

The Bible Societies and other great organizations who distribute the Scriptures could add to this testimony a thousandfold with story after story of how, not only for the great, but also for the lowly, God has been able to use the Bible as the transmitter of his wisdom at a moment when it was greatly needed. Indeed, it can hardly be denied that to actual people at specific times in their lives the Bible has been the very voice of God, occasions without number.

Unfortunately, this is only one side of the coin. The other side presents equally conclusive testimony that on other occasions the Bible has been not the voice of God but the opposite. Many will exclaim, "But this is not the fault of the Bible!" We hasten to agree. It is always because of human ignorance and sin. Yet even the Bible can be turned to evil use.

Let us return to the account of the temptation of Jesus in the wilderness (Luke 4). We have already noted how, when he was tempted to turn the stones into bread, it was the voice of God in the words of Scripture that came to

his rescue. But that is not the end of the story. Later in this same experience, Jesus found himself on the pinnacle of the Temple in Jerusalem, and the voice of temptation came again, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here; *for it is written,* 'He will give his angels charge of you, to guard you,' and, 'On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.' "

These words were words of Scripture, straight out of the 91st Psalm, part of "God's Word." Yet nobody will say that in that moment God was speaking to Jesus. As a matter of fact the Bible itself says that it was Satan who was speaking. The evil spirit of the world, the same spirit of rationalization by which we all seek out good reasons for doing bad things, was able to turn even the words of a Scriptural hymn into a temptation to evil.

In this way down through the ages when the written Word has tried to stand above the Word made flesh, when the Bible has preceded Christ in man's hour of decision, the very Scriptures that have been "wonderful words of life" to millions have become words of death instead.

The early New England Puritans were a stern folk who took the Bible seriously. They had made a covenant to live by it. At a time of crisis in the early history of Salem, Massachusetts, the Bible said to them, "Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live" (Exodus 22:18). We need not discuss the relevance of that commandment to the day in which it was written, nor seek at this late date to say how the Puritans should have interpreted it. The fact remains that, on the authority of this dictum from the Scriptures, several women, whose only crime was that they were considered "queer" by their neighbors, were put to death by hanging and the whole community was subjected to an orgy of superstitious fear far removed from the Christian gospel.

In many places today we can hear the words of the Bible being used to promote the purposes of Satan. There are those who seek to justify the doctrine of white supremacy

and the institution of slavery on Scriptural grounds. Others would have us believe that communism is a Biblical creed. Still others call upon the Bible to testify that the Anglo-Saxon race is ordained to rule the world. In fact, it is difficult to find among the fantastic "isms" of our day one that does not have some defenders who promote it in the name of the Bible. The devils who seek to seduce their victims by quoting Holy Writ did not disappear in the first century. They still stalk their prey today.

Therefore, the question legitimately arises, "How am I to know when I read the Bible whether it is God or someone else who is speaking to me? How can a man who is not a Biblical scholar find his way around in the Book?" Or, more positively, "Since God has spoken to men through the Bible, how can I get Him to speak to me and to my need?"

The answer is, "Begin with Jesus!" The same Christ who is Lord of life and Lord of the Church is also Lord of the Bible, and the only way to understand life or the Church or the Bible is to begin with him.

We are reminded of the plight of a stranger who comes to Boston to study and wants to learn to find his way around. Boston is full of narrow, winding streets, most of them too narrow for two-way traffic, some of them only wide enough for pedestrians. At first glance it seems as if there is no rhyme nor reason to the way in which they were laid out—and the same impression holds at last glance, too. Yet, there is a way by which, not immediately, but after study and practice, one can learn his way about Boston. The secret is to begin with Beacon Street. This ancient street begins right in the business district. It goes up over Beacon Hill by the State House and several denominational HQ's. It goes by the Common and the Public Garden around which are many places of utility and interest. It goes out through Kenmore Square a stone's throw from Fenway Park, home of the Red Sox, and within a block of

the mammoth Sears Roebuck Store. It goes within a block of Boston University, and then heads out through Brookline and Newton right by Boston College's back door, finally arriving at Route 128, the superhighway that circles Boston and leads to all the main routes north, south, and west. Thus, if you have a map and use Beacon Street as a guide you can get nearly anywhere you want to go, and, by branching out, short distances at first, and then farther and farther, by the time a year has rolled by you can get to know Boston better than most native Bostonians.

The Bible is in some respects a good deal like Boston. It grew by accumulation in much the same way. At first glance, it seems as if there is no rhyme or reason to the choice of these particular books. But here, upon investigation, we find a difference between the city and the Book, for at last glance we become convinced that there was a purpose in the growth of the Book. In Boston, to find our way around we begin with Beacon Street. In the Bible we begin with Jesus Christ. We begin first with the Gospels, the stories of his life that start the New Testament. Then, digging back into the Old Testament, we find foreshadowings of his coming in the accounts of the great hunger of a people for divine deliverance by a Man to be sent from God. And after the Gospels in the New Testament, we behold the growing Church finding in Jesus first *the way,* then *the truth,* then *the life.* And after establishing this home base, this beachhead on the Biblical shore, we can take exploratory expeditions into the hinterlands to discover the other treasures beyond. By beginning with Jesus as a central theme and Lord of the Bible, and by returning to him for reassurance and interpretation every time we get lost, we can make the Bible the cornerstone of true faith it was meant to be. If we begin with Jesus and keep him first in authority and inspiration, the Bible will be "God's Word" to us.

At this point we recommend *A Guide to Understanding the Bible,* by Harry Emerson Fosdick, as the greatest available help for the average Christian who wants to know how to read the Bible with intelligent devotion, and the Harper's Bible Dictionary as the best one-volume reference book.

Christ is over our own ambitions and desires

Once there was a board fence in a certain city where somebody had scrawled with a piece of chalk, "To Hell with anybody!" We think we understand the feelings out of which this exclamation grew, and they are not altogether bad. This was some small boy's rebellion against the imprisoning chains of authority. It was his Declaration of Independence. And there is something about throwing off the authority of one's elders that is like the bursting of the cocoon when a caterpillar becomes a butterfly. True life does not begin until true freedom begins.

One of the strengths of American life has been the distrust of authority, the unwillingness to bow down to any monarch or fuehrer or dictator. The tendency to enforce regularity of thought and opinion in recent years is a retreat from this position, which is to be deplored. It is part of the mores of our land to resent authority, to be willing to try the new rather than to be content with the old, and to submit only to those regulations we feel to be just.

This attitude makes the adult American who is considering the Christian commitment for the first time a bit suspicious of it. This call to commit his life to Jesus Christ, to become not his own man but Christ's man, is likely to make him say, "Hold on! Just a blank-blank minute! I'm an American. We don't believe in dictators. I'm my own boss, and I don't want to resign the throne of my life to anybody, not even Jesus." We have heard Henley sing, "I am the master of my fate. I am the captain of my soul!" It sounds good to us.

Our reaction is similar to that of the congregation of John the Baptist who said, "What do you mean, 'repent and be saved'? We're sons of Abraham, saved already" (Matthew 3:9).

This betrays a common lack of understanding of the meaning of life and the meaning of freedom. It is quite usual for a child or a man to confuse liberty with license. "When I'm 21, I can do as I please!" There are two reasons why this is not so. One is what "doing as I please" will do to me. The other is what it is likely to do to people with whom I live. We are all endowed with appetites and desires of the body which, when under control, contribute to life. But if we accept the definition of freedom implied above, what we often do is surrender our wills, not to a dictator outside ourselves, but to a dictator within, and we become slaves to food or lust or ambition or liquor. In any case we are confronted with problems arising from the fact that doing what I please always interferes with somebody else's doing what he pleases. And the situation is further complicated by the fact that if life is to be satisfactory at all we must maintain relationships of mutual love and respect, one with another.

The great truth to realize at this point is that obedience is no detriment to liberty when, in obeying, we are fulfilling our highest desires. Part of the search for freedom is the throwing off of external authority, but this is only the beginning. The end of the search for freedom does not come until we have found the inward spiritual authority to which obedience is joy and fulfillment. It is not within our reach to choose whether we shall live or die. We are to die —perhaps sooner, perhaps later. But it is within our reach to choose that for which we are to die. Freedom is achieved when we have found a cause to which to give our lives day-by-day and which is truly worth the sacrifice. Indeed, if we are to be truly free, the cause to which we give our-

selves day-by-day must turn our sacrifice into a victory and not be a sacrifice at all.

The life we have is ours alone to give away. Sometimes we give it to self-indulgence, sometimes to the search for wealth and power, sometimes to the service of family, or clan, or country, sometimes to the promotion of an idea like communism or fascism or democracy. The Christian gives his life to Jesus Christ because he believes the Master is good enough and powerful enough to merit his total allegiance. And when he does this, whether his name is Simon or Saul or Thomas or John Doe or Richard Roe, he finds that he is most free when he is most bound to his Lord. There are very few records of any who ever made this decision and became totally committed to Jesus who did not find in him the perfect and sufficient answer to the quest for liberty and for fulfillment. A free man is a man who has and does what he wants most. All low desires with which we are born satisfy for a time, but then become our masters when we no longer want to fulfill them. Christ can give us a new set of desires, higher, holier, more worthy. And he can also give us the means to fulfill those desires. But our commitment to him must be complete. Jesus is either a crazy stranger or the Lord of life. To the Christian, Christ comes first.

We begin our study of Christianity where Christianity begins, with Christ. Perhaps our pilgrimage may be like that of Thomas who found in him *the way,* and *the truth,* and *the life.* "Doubting Thomas" has become a byword, often a slur or a jibe. But if we are honest, we all begin where he began, and we are fortunate indeed if we arrive where he arrived.

If we walk where Thomas walked we shall begin by following Jesus, *the way.* We shall follow him into the wilderness to learn to pray, into the busy streets of the city to learn to serve, we shall stand with the multitudes listening

to the Sermon on the Mount and learn the rules of life. We shall follow him from afar as he climbs Golgotha and behold the glory of loyalty to the end. Remember, it was doubting Thomas who, when it was plain that Jesus was, indeed, going to Jerusalem, said, "Let us go and die with him" (John 11:16).

Then, if we follow faithfully, we shall find Christ, *the truth*. We are told that after the Resurrection Thomas refused to believe until he had actually touched the wounds in the body of the risen Lord. We are unlikely to have that privilege. Yet, there are other ways of arriving at the reality of who Jesus was and what he actually did to history. Many, even in this skeptical generation, have been driven to their knees as Thomas was, to exclaim with him, "My Lord and my God!" (John 20:28).

Whether our spiritual enlightenment be slow or rapid the commitment to discipleship is the first step upon the best journey we shall ever take. Its goal and end is *the life* in Christ.

If Jesus Christ is a man—
And only a man,—I say
That of all mankind I cleave to him,
And to him will I cleave away.
If Jesus Christ is a God—
And the only God,—I swear
I will follow Him through heaven and hell,
The earth, the Sea, the air!

—Richard Watson Gilder

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Why is faith in a person more vital in our lives than faith in an idea? Or is it?*

2. *What effect did the death of Lenin and Stalin have on the international communist movement in their times?*
3. *In what ways are Communism and Fascism religions? In what ways are they different from the ancient religions of the East?*
4. *In the struggle for the loyalty of mankind, what does Communism have that Christianity doesn't have, and vice versa?*
5. *Where is our church on the upward trail beginning with the way and ascending through the truth to the life? How many of our members could reasonably be called "saints"?*
6. *What is the authority of the Bible? How can Jesus help us to understand the Holy Scriptures?*
7. *What is the difference between absolute allegiance to Jesus and absolute allegiance to a pope or dictator as regards personal freedom?*
8. *What right does Jesus have to demand our total allegiance?*

2 *The Christian Believes in God*

. . . we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.
—I Timothy 4:10

Having set our feet upon *the way,* we now seek to apprehend *the truth.* Having been confronted with the person of Jesus and having committed our lives to him, we now look to behold what he has to show us and listen to hear the good news that he proclaims about God.

The first great affirmation of the Christian faith is that God is a living God. This we owe to the Hebrews. It has been their age-old pride, the thing that made them for centuries a peculiar people among the tribes of the earth, that they believed not in any idols but in "the *living* God." The scorn of the prophets for gods made of wood or gold, gods who must be carted from one place to another because they had no life to move themselves, is one of the great themes of the Old Testament.

The religious leaders of the ancient Hebrews held to this faith through thick and thin amidst the fickleness of the spiritually weak among them and the wondering incomprehension of their neighbors and conquerors. The story is told of how Pompey, the Roman, after the conquest of Jerusalem, paid a visit to the Temple to satisfy his curiosity. All his life he had heard of this Hebrew people with their one god who lived in Jerusalem and for whose sake they could not be assimilated into any alien religion. Now they were beaten and he, their vanquisher, would have a look. He knew where to find this god. He had heard about the room in the middle of the Temple where no human being was ever allowed to go except the High Priest, and he only

once a year. Now he, Pompey, would share this secret. So he strode through the gates, by the beautiful courtyards, by the altars where the sacrifices were offered, and he stood at last in front of the great curtain that hid the Holy of Holies from mortal view. Roughly he threw aside the curtain and walked into the very room where dwelt the god of Israel. But it was the greatest disappointment of his life. There was nothing in the room at all, but *nothing*. There was no statue, no picture, no image. "What a hoax," he thought as he turned away. He could not understand that the god he was looking for did not exist except in his imagination, that He whom the Hebrews worshipped was no statue or image but the *living God* who created the universe and set the heavenly bodies on their courses. Jerusalem he could destroy. The Temple he could loot and defile. But the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob he could not capture, for He was not a dead idol but a living Spirit beyond the reach of torch or sword.

So, because of the Hebrews, and because Jesus grew up in a Hebrew home under the instruction of a Hebrew mother and Hebrew rabbis, the Christian believes in the living God.

This is the doctrine first to be ridiculed by the scoffers at religion. They have a seventy-five-cent word for it, "anthropomorphism." "God created man in his image?" they say. "Nonsense! man creates God in his image. To talk about a God who is alive, who is 'personal,' is a presumptuous beyond comprehension. For man, an insignificant organism of much sorrow and few days on an insignificant planet in an unimportant corner of the universe, to pretend that the Soul of the cosmos is anything like him is," say the scoffers, "a shallow example of wishful thinking."

Yet the Christian clings to his belief. Two arguments puncture the cynic's jeer: (1) To say that God is living and "personal" is not to say that that is all He is. It is only to say that He must be at least greater than his greatest crea-

ture. (2) All other descriptions of God are far more belittling and insulting than to say that He is "personal." Others call God a "force," a "process," a "tendency," a "purpose," an "aspect," a "principle of order and harmony." These degrade Him utterly, for all these ideas describe some mechanistic monstrosity far less worthy than the most puny man, and insignificant beside one like Jesus Christ. Once it was said, "Astronomically speaking, man is insignificant," to which it was replied, "Astronomically speaking, man is the astronomer!"

There was a time, not so many years ago, when it was fashionable to think of the universe as a dead machine. This was an attitude adorned with the adjective "scientific" and it was based upon some ideas of chemistry and physics which are now as out of date as high-buttoned shoes. The weight of learned opinion, not only in philosophy, but in science as well, has been shifting more and more towards the support of the Christian suppositions about ultimate reality in rerent years.

Albert Einstein has said, "The universe is much more like a thought than it is like a machine."

A. Cressey Morrison, one-time President of the New York Academy of Sciences, says in his little book, *Man Does Not Stand Alone,* "There is not one chance in millions that life on our planet is an accident." He scoffs at the scoffers, saying to all that to assume that the world as we know it happened by chance is like saying that if the letters of the alphabet were spilled from a paper bag enough times they would finally come out in the form of a Shakespearean sonnet. The chances of that having happened without the intervention of a Creative Spirit are, he believes, too fantastically small to be believed. At least, belief in a dead universe is far more ridiculous than belief in the living God.

Lecomte de Nouy wrote an epoch-making book in 1947 entitled *Human Destiny.* In it this first-magnitude scientist

says, "Evolution is unmistakably the orderly working of Mind." He makes the Christian assumption, that things as we see them and know them are a hymn sung by creation in praise of its Creator, a rational judgment based on perception and logic.

So the great primary article of the Christian faith is that the one God, Soul of the cosmos, Creator of the universe, is alive. God is not "It" but "He." God is vastly more than anything we can know, but at least as great as our greatest concepts of Him. It is a reasonable thing to say that God is alive and personal.

The living God partakes of the supreme attributes of personality: justice and love. . . .

The moral law testifies to God's judgment

One of the easiest religious concepts to demonstrate is that which affirms that the universe is weighted according to a moral purpose. The world in which we live is littered with signs of God's judgment, mute but clear testimony that the living God is not to be trifled with when He lays down the Law.

We first notice this as it applies to nations. After World War II, an article appeared in a leading religious journal to the effect that regardless of which peoples claimed to have won there was little doubt that the moral law had been vindicated. France, whose people "threw out the baby with the bath" in rejecting all religion when they turned their backs on the corrupt church at the time of their revolution, found themselves weak and divided in the face of Hitler's attack, and their defeat was quick. This spiritual apostasy and moral decay has resulted in a continuation of national disunity which has prevented any continued policies of reconstruction from being followed both during and since the war. In spite of the final qualities of those who have kept alive the French traditions of *"liberté, égalité et fraternité,"* the great inertia of those who have

surrendered to materialistic hedonism keeps France mired whenever she seeks to move in any direction.

Great Britain, who, in the nineteenth century, took the privilege of ruling a third of the world's people without paying much attention to the obligations incurred with that privilege, found herself at the end of the war stripped of her riches and reduced to the rank of a second-rate power. The exploited peoples of the colonial empire had the pleasure of seeing the foreign overlords sail away from their shores. While the staunch and solid virtues of the people of the home islands make some of us believe indeed that "there'll always be an England," it is a fact that the imperial Britisher who could push anybody around, no matter where he hung his hat, is fast becoming as extinct as the dodo bird.

Japan adopted Western ways after she got acquainted with us a hundred years ago. So fully did she take over the Western pattern that she decided to start an empire of her own. Brutally and without pity, she went to work. Just as ruthlessly as any Western, European nation, she took over one bit after another of surrounding territory, finally making the play for the jackpot at Pearl Harbor in 1941. The results of this escapade in loss of territory and in national humiliation are apparent to anybody. Japan tried to do what Great Britain did one hundred years earlier; only she reaped her reward immediately, instead of postponing it a century as her sister island empire was able to do.

Germany's sins were great also, and her punishment is beyond belief save for one who travels through her ruined cities and beholds the bitterness and hopelessness that remain more than a decade after the bombs fell. In Dachau, the crematory still stands as a memorial both to horror and to the lives of those who perished there. At one end of the brick building which holds the world's record for cold-blooded, reasoned cruelty there is a little plot of ground about 50 feet square where lie the ashes of an estimated

250,000 people who were put to death there. When Hitler gassed these men and women he thought he was destroying the enemies of Germany. Actually, because God is a just God, he was destroying not the enemies of Germany but Germany herself, and Hitler with her. On the portico of a ruined church in East Berlin there is written, "Blessed is the man who hears the Word of God and heeds it." This is true. It is also true that "Cursed is the man (or nation) who hears the Word of God and does not heed it." The nation of Martin Luther, the cradle of the Reformation, the fountainhead of Protestant theology, heard the Word of God for four centuries and more as no other nation was privileged to hear it. But thrice in the past 100 years she heeded not God's Word but the word of militaristic imperialism, and her ruined cities are witness to this grim fact. The God of nations is a just God. His laws cannot be broken with impunity.

Here we must point out that the new leader of the world, the United States of America, is no more exempt from the laws of God than were her predecessors, none of whom escaped the temptation to abuse the power committed to them by history. Some things have happened which give us a glimmer of hope. Treaties have been signed without the victor's exacting punitive reparations from the vanquished. Wealth has been poured out by the victor to help the vanquished back on his feet. But the same pride, the same nationalistic jingoism, the same racial bigotry, and the same "me first" philosophy which have dug deep the graves of all previous world rulers, are eating like termites at our national foundations. We will do well to take to heart the lessons of history. "God is not dead nor doth He sleep!"

The judgment of God also applies to individuals. The writer of these pages served for a time as the chairman of a state parole board. It was his task to interview hundreds of the inmates of correctional institutions, as their time of release drew near, to determine whether or not they were

ready to return to society. In this experience he became increasingly aware of the injustice of man. People guilty of the same crime would receive vastly different treatment simply because they came before a judge who was "tough" or "soft" or because they "knew the right people." Sometimes it was his considered opinion that men were convicted unjustly, and many times it appeared that the guilty got off scot-free. Yet, the clearer it became that man's justice is full of defects, the clearer it also became that against the injustice of man there is a justice of God which balances the scales in the long run. Men convicted unjustly have been known to rise above vindictiveness and achieve traits of character—patience, hope, self-discipline, etc.—which made their stay behind bars not wasted time but a time of growth and learning with rewards that are clearly visible in their later lives. On the other hand, those who escape their just deserts adopt ideas of selfish importance, confidence, and greed which inevitably trip them up and lead to greater future punishment. In addition, the complementary factors of remorse and a clear conscience are always at work with their punitive and restoring influence. The old adage says, "The mills of the gods grind slowly, but they grind exceeding fine." The judgment of God is not immediately apparent, but in the long run it can well be demonstrated that man does not escape it. The fact that a gangster is buried in a $12,000 bronze casket does not cancel the fact that he spent his days in dread and knew not what it was to love and to be trusted. Life apart from God is often its own punishment.

The Biblical writer who cried out to God, "Why does the way of the wicked prosper?" (Jeremiah 12:1) was deceived by a short-term look at human experience. There is no surer fact than the one here affirmed, that God is a God of judgment whose commandments cannot be broken with impunity.

The Christian's God is love

While it is quite easy to demonstrate that the wicked suffer for their sins, it is not so simple to point out that the righteous either escape suffering or are rewarded for their righteousness. While it is easy to understand the faith of the Christian in the God of judgment it is more difficult to understand our world as the creation of the God of love. This is because Christian love is the one concept of our religion that is wholly divine and therefore foreign to purely human understanding. It takes a little explaining, but it is the core of our faith, the principle without which Christianity is meaningless.

We have become so used to the verbal statement, "God is love," that we are inclined to think it has always been a conviction of mankind. We do not appreciate what a terrific affirmation it is in the face of harsh reality. Dorothy Clarke Wilson in her novel, *The Brother,* recaptures for us the wonder of this idea in its newness. James, the brother of Jesus, became aware that the older boy would often leave his bed late at night for hours at a time. One night he decided to find out where it was Jesus went at these times. He followed him at a distance to a little hollow below the top of a hill outside Nazareth which was a "secret place" to the two of them. They often went there together on days when they had time to play together. James crept closer to see what it was his brother was doing, and he saw that he was kneeling with his face upturned, his lips moving in conversation. After overcoming his first fear that there might be another person there to whom he was talking, James came still closer to hear what Jesus was saying. He couldn't get all the words, but again and again there was one word that came from his lips with a peculiar tenderness. This word was, "Father!" Here under the quiet sky of night, even though he dimly understood, James was the witness to the birth of a completely new concept about the ultimate nature of reality. Here in the night a human being

looked up into the face of the Eternal and called Him "Father!" In spite of plagues and tornadoes and floods, in spite of famines and wars, in spite of the pains of mortality, Jesus had the audacity to believe and later to teach that God loves humanity as a good father loves his children. Augustine later stated it, "God loves us all as if we were one, and every one of us as if he were the only one in the world."

Having discovered the divine love, Jesus proceeded to demonstrate it in his life. We said earlier that there is one exception to the oft-repeated statement that all the ideas of Christianity can be found in other philosophies and religions. This is the exception. *Absolute, self-giving love as a universal principle came into history in the life and thought of Jesus.* He understood it. He taught it. He lived it. Completely.

Here we should pinpoint the difference between divine love and human love. Human love is the answer of one life to the beauty or goodness of another. Divine love is unilateral, it gives itself to the beloved regardless of the worth of the beloved, who may be evil or ugly or both. The human love of a husband for his wife is in proportion to the physical, mental, and spiritual joy he has in her. When this joy ceases so does his human love. What is left after this is gone is divine love. It is not necessary to state that divine love is a scarce commodity.

The life of Jesus is supremely unique in this respect. He was in his earthly ministry and life totally possessed by divine love. No man ever saw the failings of humanity in their stark reality any more clearly than did Jesus. Frailty, hypocrisy, lust, greed, pride, and all the rest were an open book to him. Yet, in spite of this perfect realization of the evil and the weakness behind every person's mask, Jesus was able to love him. And his love was often the instrument by which the evil and weakness were destroyed for a time and the latent image of God enabled to come forth.

His disciples, even those who lived with him, continually bickered among themselves as to which should be the greatest. When Jesus needed them most in the hour of his arrest and trial, they ran away. Again and again as he taught them, they showed themselves utterly unable to comprehend his message. Yet, his love for them never wavered.

The love of Christ is focused and made complete upon the cross. Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Then he proceeded to die with prayers upon his lips for those who drove the nails through his flesh. Some will say that in doing so he disproved his definition of the greatest love. Is it not a greater thing to lay down one's life for one's enemies than it is to die for one's friends? This is to miss the meaning of divine love. Jesus did not regard those who killed him as his enemies. He refused to be an enemy because he would not hate those who hated him. Enmity requires that two shall hate one another. When one refuses to hate, the relationship of enmity is foiled. On the human level, friendship requires reciprocal affection. But on the divine level we can be friends unilaterally by loving others whether they love us or not. This was the relationship Jesus made possible. He brought it into the reach of men by being that kind of friend. In total disregard of what others felt about him he loved others to the point of giving his life for them upon the cross. This gives us weaker human beings a reason for the same kind of loving. While we may find it humanly impossible to love the unlovely, we may be able to achieve divine love because we know that Jesus loved us in spite of our evil and weakness. "We love because he first loved us" (I John 4:19).

This is the minimum of Christian faith. It is the part of the Gospel that can be demonstrated "beyond a reasonable doubt." *The love of Jesus is the supreme fact of history.* By sheer quantitative historical research it can be demon-

strated that the chain reaction from soul to soul set off by the act of Jesus in giving himself wholly for mankind—for those who hated him enough to kill him and those who did not love him enough to stay by him—has produced greater results than any other single event ever recorded. This is true whether we are looking for quantity or quality, whether we are interested merely in bigness of impact or the goodness and worth of a given event. The outpouring of love that came from Jesus into human life had more far-reaching consequences than any other historical force, and it is still, after 2,000 years, the greatest power to be reckoned with in the world. And when we consider values, reciting the deeds of mercy done in his name, recording the institutions for human welfare founded because of him, reviewing the long story of the Christian world mission through the centuries, it can be said in perfect confidence that nothing that ever happened was fraught with so much good for mankind.

The eternal puzzle—the problem of evil

So much for the Christ-act. Easy it is to preach about the magnificence of Christ, the peak of human nature and achievement. It is not so easy to demonstrate that God, even the living God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, is like Jesus. Here we run smack up against the toughest problem in philosophy and theology, the problem of evil. It is hard enough to answer the question, "How can a loving God allow wars to happen?" We answer by saying that God doesn't make wars, He only makes people who make the wars through their evil intent. But this is only half an answer. The real question is, "How can we believe in a loving God when suffering and death are the natural order of human life?"

A roaring twister comes down on a sleeping town and a hundred homes are left in piles of splintered wreckage with the maimed and the dead beneath them. A volcano erupts

and a river of white-hot death pours over a city, blotting it out forever. A fault in the earth's crust produces an earthquake. These dramatize the fact, which at other times we can forget, that man is mortal, and that, with the exception of a few privileged people born in a few rich countries, his days are full of evil. More than half the world goes to bed hungry every night, and every human being knows that he must sometime die a death preceded by more or less agony. These are not pessimistic illusions. They are the facts of life. How do we account for them?

Many who are not Christians have dealt with these questions and arrived at answers which, while not conclusive, enable them to live with them. Actually, every one of us provides an answer with his life, whether he ever really thinks about the questions or not.

There are the Epicureans who say, "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!" These are the people who admit, "Sure, life is full of woe for some folks, but not for me, now. As long as I can enjoy myself, I will. Life is short at best, so why be concerned about tomorrow?" This philosophy works fine—until tomorrow comes! And it does come. Don't be fooled by any easy assertions to the contrary.

The Stoics are a step above the Epicureans. At least, they embark on a heroic course. Life is part good and part evil, they own; so they resolve not to notice the evil. They may even deny that the evil exists, and become Christian Scientists. Sometimes they strive mightily for good causes, and often their lives are spent in love. They can suffer deeply without showing it to the world, and though the inside may be on fire the outside is serene. If one does not wish or dare to commit himself in faith to the full Christian answer to what and why evil exists, he had better be a Stoic. They are often admirable people.

Some will follow the lead of the pessimistic philosophers like Schopenhauer who believe that the universe is a great,

dead, cosmic accident. Man just kids himself if he thinks there is any good in life, for even his good days are a deception making him think he's something more than he is. Actually, according to these people, the best thing to do is to commit suicide and get it over with. The remarkable thing is that they seldom take their own advice. Usually they live quite normal lives, except that this kind of philosophy makes moral restraints quite conveniently flexible.

Then there are the answers that grew out of the Eastern religions of suffering. In the great well of misery known as Asia, it is not surprising that people nod in agreement when Buddha says, "To live is to suffer. Life equals suffering. To escape from suffering one must escape from living." From this central pivot come the doctrines about Nirvana, the land of the sanctified dead where in peace and shadowy half-existence they enjoy apartness from life. These religions teach moral value by warning that until one has achieved moral holiness he will be condemned to continue living. The Hindu says that if one does not do his duty he will be reincarnated after death, returning to earth as a lesser being than he was. If he fulfills his lot to the satisfaction of the gods, he will be reincarnated as a higher being, so escaping at last from the top rung of the human ladder into Nirvana.

The Christian explanation of evil

Finally there is the Christian answer. It is not easy. It requires faith and devotion. But no other answer offers either the rational conviction or the living satisfaction that this answer makes possible. St. Augustine expressed it more concisely than any other: "God thought it a greater thing to bring good out of evil than not to suffer evil to exist." It is the conviction of the Christian that the living God is good, and that He loves people at least as much as a good human father loves his children. God must be at least as

full of love as Jesus, his supreme creature. Therefore, it is the conviction of the Christian that evil, while terrible and real, is always temporal and finite, while good is eternal and infinite. Since God is God no matter how black the day may be, it can always become "Good" Friday because of the transforming power of divine love.

John Gunther, author of the "Inside" books on the internal affairs of various countries and continents, is also the author of a tragic and moving little book called *Death, Be Not Proud!* It is the story of the final months in the life of his own son. While the boy was studying at one of New England's finer preparatory schools it was discovered that he had a brain tumor. One operation followed another. Then, in desperation, treatments of all kinds followed the operations. Sometimes, between operations and treatments, he could get up about the house, but more often he was confined to bed. Any human being can imagine what that family went through with alternate fears and hopes, while striving to help each other in the common fight against the enemy, cancer. The hero of the piece is the lad himself who, while battling for his life, not only completed his courses at home so that he could graduate with his class, but also passed the entrance examinations at Harvard. When, with his head swathed in a turban of bandages, he walked down the aisle to receive his prep school diploma, the people assembled for the commencement program experienced a moment of triumph none of them will ever forget. It cannot be dimmed by the fact that he died before he could enter Harvard in the fall.

To the pagan, this experience was a moment of defiance, of victory of the human spirit over fear. To the Christian, it is a demonstration of the love and goodness of God in that the cancerous tumor, while evil in itself in the time that it existed, was instrumental in bringing forth heroism, courage, patience, and a host of other spiritual goods which never otherwise would have appeared at all. It goes without

saying that without belief in immortality (which we shall discuss in our final chapter) this is nonsense. But the Christian agrees with the stage manager in Thornton Wilder's play, *Our Town,* when he says, "There's something eternal in every human being." With this opportunity for the transforming of present evil into future good, it is possible to see how even hardship and tragedy can sometimes bear fruits of greater moral and spiritual grandeur than can times of ease and pleasure.

In the midst of tornadoes and earthquakes, depressions and wars, there is developed among people a spirit of neighborliness and self-sacrifice which in ordinary times would be unbelievable. In spite of the horror of war with its seeds of hate that keep growing up into new conflicts generation after generation, the philosophers have told us for centuries that when mankind succeeds in outlawing war we must find a "moral equivalent" for it or heroic self-dedication may disappear. Military leaders never cease to be amazed at the numbers of soldiers who, being offered discharges after having been treated for wounds in battle, refuse the coveted "HD" and return instead to their outfits at the front. There is more than selfless devotion in acts like this. These men have found in the close intimacy of the battlefield a sense of "belonging," a feeling of the worthwhileness of living, an experience of brotherhood that makes the old round of "getting and spending" at home a pale and meaningless thing by comparison. This is not to recommend that we start wars or cultivate tragedy because of the virtues that come as byproducts. God forbid! It is only to say that in the nature of things "God thought it a greater thing to bring good out of evil than not to suffer evil to exist."

Out of evil, good

In his creation He has taken care of this. Our mortality is universal and inescapable. Our humanity is unavoidable.

Death and war and pain and social and economic maladjustment are our enemies to be fought against. Still we are promised that "In all things God works for good to those who love Him" (Romans 8:28). With his help we can fight these natural foes and in every fighting achieve our highest destiny. In the Bible, when, towards the end of his life, Joseph forgave his brothers for having sold him into slavery, he uttered a forecast of this great Christian truth, "You meant to do me harm, but God accounted it for good" (Genesis 50:20). The hard years as a slave developed in Joseph the spiritual muscles he needed in his years of responsibility as ruler of Egypt after Pharaoh made him his first steward. This theme is one of the great novel plots, worked over again and again. *The Count of Monte Cristo* and *Les Miserables* are only two of the many tales about men who found in times of suffering the character with which to live worthily in times of prosperity.

But we don't have to go to fiction for demonstrations of the principle. The American dream, "from log cabin to White House," is no dream at all. It has many flesh and blood incarnations besides Abraham Lincoln. In fact, the greatest peril to American life today is not hardship but ease. The men whose names are written in *Who's Who* were not born in prosperous Suburbia (with a few notable exceptions), but in the teeming slums of the city or in the open country where to live is to work, to strive, and sometimes to suffer. Lest we be misunderstood, we hasten to say again that this is not an argument against slum clearance or good tractors and fertilizer. Having won the first battle against want in our own land we must have religion enough to fight these foes just as bitterly in other lands. And there is enough to keep us busy for a long, long time if we don't get mired in laziness.

The cross of Christ, again, is our most sublime assurance of the power and love of God. When Jesus was nailed to it, the greatest crime in history was committed. Nobody can

deny that it was evil, completely and diabolically evil, when it happened. Yet we have come to call that day "Good Friday" because it marks the point in history at which sublime goodness entered human living. God "who makes the wrath of man to praise Him" was able to take that evil deed and make it work for Him to the healing of the nations in all future time.

There is still another question that should be considered here. The skeptic may say, "Yes, the kind of life we live may be better with temporary evil in it than with nothing but ease. But why didn't God make a different kind of world altogether, with a different kind of being as its goal? What is the reason for having this kind of world? Why did God do it this way?"

This is a good question to ask and answer while we are studying the love of God because it is here the Christian makes one of his most amazing, yet most profound, affirmations. In the sermon of creation written in *God's Trombones,* the writer, Johnson, says that the reason God made the world was that He was lonely and wanted to create a being who could keep Him company. That is why He made man "in his own image." This is a warm and living way of saying what the Hebrew-Christian tradition has always affirmed, that, at his best, man has a kinship with the very nature of God. Where is this kinship apparent? It is at the point of divine love, "The Greatest Thing in the World."

Evil puts divine love within the reach of man

We recall that divine love is pure, self-giving, outgoing, unilateral love offered not because of any goodness in the beloved but out of the grace and goodness of the lover. We see it best in our world in Jesus. In this respect among others he brings God to earth. The Christian affirms that the true destiny of man is to be able to love in this way. When a man loves with total abandon of selfish concern

he is truly and completely a man, a child of the living God. Whenever he fails to do this he is less than what God made him to be. When this goal is achieved, God's purpose in creation, to make a being enough like himself to be capable of fellowship with Him, is fulfilled. The religious life, the Christian life of faith and hope and love, is only possible when this happens. It is God's love apprehended and shared by man that makes creation complete. Indeed, this fellowship of God with man, and of man with man on the basis of divine love, is the whole purpose of creation. We suggest here the reading of the fourth chapter of the First Epistle of John, where this idea is set forth both clearly and beautifully.

Here is the Christian answer to the question, "Why are suffering and death a part of God's creation?" Without these two grim realities it would be impossible for man to achieve the divine destiny for which he was made. Suppose there were no death on the physical plane. Or suppose it was clearly and immediately apparent that good deeds result in rewards and evil deeds in punishment, either here or hereafter. Or suppose God communicated to man in language that made it impossible for man to doubt. Under these conditions would man be able to love the way God loves? He would not. In his frailty he would love God in human terms because of God's apparent goodness, not because of any heroic venture of faith on his part. He would avoid sin because of fear alone, because its consequences would be immediately visible. He would be like any single-celled creature, an automaton, reacting in a dull mechanical way to stimuli, knowing only the joys of the flesh.

God knew what He was doing—or rather, knows what He is doing, for creation is still in progress. To qualify as a fit companion to God in his universe a being must first become a free self, and then of his own free will choose the way of divine love which is *the way* of Christ. Suffering

and death in their anticipation and their realization are part of the conditioning of the saints. "Who are these, clothed in white robes, and whence have they come?" comes the question, and the answer is quick and definite, "These are they who have come out of the great tribulation" (Revelation 7:13-14). This is not an affirmation of asceticism. God does not want us to seek suffering and death for their own sakes. They are our natural foes to be fought and vanquished with the weapons He gives us. The universe God has made is as He intended it to be—incomplete —so that man, his creature first and then his child, can labor with Him to finish it. To arrive at his fullest stature, a human being must learn to love as Jesus loved, staking his whole life on a venture of faith. This is the supreme end of living, and it is only possible in this kind of universe.

Nels F. S. Ferre always describes this process graphically, with violent gestures. He speaks of God as having two hands; one is judgment, the other is love. With his love in Christ and the Church He draws mankind towards his true destiny, appealing to his own divine image in man, calling upon him to accept his divine adoption by returning his fatherly love. With his other hand, judgment, He sets barriers of retribution across all ways of evil. By the prophets and the discoverers of the divine laws of righteousness, He places warning signs at all evil ways, but does not spare the rod when these signs are ignored. If we may be forgiven for making God a monstrosity in order to explain our point, we would suggest that God also has a third hand by which He administers his universe according to the way He has created it. This may not be another hand at all; it may be sometimes judgment (in its order) and sometimes love (in its concern) in disguise. But it operates without reference to man's behavior, sending hailstones into the wheatfields of the good and the evil farmer alike, sending floods through towns without sparing sinner or saint, visiting suffering and death upon all sooner or later. By the ministry

of this hand He creates the soil in which man can grow up into divinity. He offers the opportunity to all to live heroically, with abandon. Those who accept this invitation tendered in Christ find in suffering and death—yes, and in routine daily temptation and labor—the obstacles which make apparent their need for God and his availability to them, the foes to be vanquished for the prize of abundant life. Given his own time and the spirit of divine love in man, God can turn any day of crucifixion into Good Friday.

If God had made a world without suffering, man would never gain the hunger and thirst after righteousness. He would live out his days in the illusion that sensate joys are all the joys there are. If God had made a world without death, the love of Christ in laying down his life for sinners would never have happened. The Christian believes, as Jesus believed, that the living God is our loving Father. In that faith he takes his stand with the Master, sharing and transmitting the love and hope that spring like living water from it.

The Christian's God is "the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe"

Here we approach the area of nine-tenths of all the controversy at which Christians have labored ever since the Day of Pentecost. Is God's love always triumphant? If it is, how about his judgment? What is salvation? On what is the assurance of salvation based? From what is man to be saved? And if he is not saved, what then?

A few of these questions can be disposed of without a great deal of trouble. It is generally agreed that the life of the saved is the life of total love lived with God and made available in Jesus Christ. This life begins when the relationship of discipleship is established, and it goes on growing forever, being fulfilled in "the perfect fellowship of the saints above." The pictures of heavenly bliss in the Bible and elsewhere are all efforts to elaborate upon this basic

belief. It is also generally acknowledged that not to be saved is to live apart from God, separated from Him by barriers of doubt and sin. This life is one of self-deception and misery brought about by the consequences of sin. Instead of a life of faith and hope and love this is a life of doubt and despair and fear. It continues at least as long as the state of apartness from God continues. And the pictures of hell which tradition hands down to us are all portrayals of the specifics of life that is Christless.

The deep differences of opinion held by Christians of varying persuasions usually center at the points of who is to fail of salvation, who is to be "damned" and what that means, when the sentence of condemnation is passed, and how long it lasts. A common Christian doctrine is that sentence is made definite when physical death occurs if salvation does not happen before that time, and that the punishment of the damned lasts forever. There is good Scriptural backing for this teaching. But other Christians will claim equally good authority for belief that death means oblivion for the unsaved or that the saving love of God can follow us even to the abode of the condemned.

The three-fold question of salvation

There are three aspects of the question which we face as individuals. There is the moral aspect in which we face the fundamental value judgment, "How do I know what is good?" Each of us has within him the moral demand to do the right to which philosophers have given a good many fancy names, but which the word "conscience" describes quite well. We feel an obligation to believe what is true and do what is right. Therefore, we are ever seeking to ascertain what is truly good.

Secondly, there is the purely personal aspect of salvation. We are vitally concerned in the matter. When Peter asked Jesus in effect, "What are we to get for having left all and followed you?" it was not set down even by Jesus as an

irrelevant question. It is strictly on the human level, but it is in order.

Thirdly, there is the rational aspect of the question, the query which arises out of the curiosity of the mind. To borrow a common question from television, "What are the facts?"

These three aspects of the question of salvation can be phrased in three questions. (1) What ought to be so? (2) What do we want to be so? (3) What actually and objectively is so? It is part of the human dilemma that we must make our moral, personal, and intellectual decisions on the basis of incomplete evidence, just as (unless we remain single all our lives) we do when we get married.

The first two aspects of the question are answered satisfactorily when the original Christian commitment is made. As we pointed out in Chapter 1, when Jesus becomes *the way* for a disciple he represents to his follower the answer to the moral and personal parts of the question of salvation. When one says to Jesus Christ, "I am your man," he is also saying, "Though my mind does not yet comprehend the final mysteries of life I am sure at least of this: to follow Jesus is the right thing for me to do, and, whether there is such a thing as salvation from sin and death or not, to be one of his company is earth's best hope of that salvation." From the days of the apostles to the present, people have made the offering of their lives on this basis. Some have found no more assurance than this, and yet have testified that this was sufficient. Others, for whom Jesus has become more and more *the truth* as well as *the way,* have arrived at very definite convictions on the rational level.

Who shall be saved?

Protestants, historically, have divided into three camps in their opinions regarding the role of God as Savior. While there are, of course, infinite numbers of individual variations, most Christians find themselves under the banner of

the Calvinists or the Arminians or the Universalists when the final vote is taken.

Calvinists hold that God has known from the time of creation the eternal destiny of each human being. By their doctrine, salvation or damnation is eternal and is willed in advance by the Almighty God. The sentence is sealed at the time of the body's death and executed upon the Day of Judgment at the end of earthly history when, as described in Matthew 25, the righteous are set aside to eternal bliss and the wicked to eternal torment. While Calvinists believe that no acts of goodness during earthly life can change the verdict they do recognize that good deeds and a right relationship with God are often the visible indications of salvation. Earthly life, then, is for them a desperate search after mystical assurance that they are indeed among "the elect," and when this assurance comes, joy is complete. Traditionally the Presbyterian and Reformed churches have been the exponents of Calvinism.

Arminians, who take their name from Arminius, a theologian who disputed with John Calvin on this subject, agree with the Calvinists at all points save one. Their ideas regarding the imposition and duration of the sentence of damnation or reward of sanctity are the same. But the Arminians place superlative importance upon the life we are living in this world. Their contention is that it is not decided whether we shall be saved or not until the body dies. Not even God knows whether or not we shall be saved until that time. Arminians hold that every human being has the opportunity to accept God's salvation through faith in Jesus Christ. Whether it happens in childhood or upon the deathbed is not of essential importance. What does matter supremely is that sometime between "the age of discretion" and death one must voluntarily surrender himself to God in Christ and maintain that relationship until the end. If this is done, salvation is guaranteed. If it is not done, salvation is lost forever. The Methodists

have been historically the great champions of Arminianism.

Universalists, not to be exclusively identified with the small denomination who first promulgated and still champion the idea, can be identified very simply as those who believe that at some time in eternity all human beings will receive the salvation of God. In this camp there is no such agreement as one finds in the other two, although as with all theologians there are plenty of internecine discussions among Calvinists and Arminians. The Universalists are scattered abroad among all Christian denominations, here a few and there a good many. Some of them do not believe in hell after death at all, affirming that all the hell there is is complete in this life and in the ordeal of death. On the other hand, there are those who in all other respects are orthodox Calvinists or Arminians who have come to deny that physical death can forever slam the door of heaven in the sinner's face.

It goes without saying that these questions are beyond the reach of the human mind, so far as final, irrefutable answers are concerned. We will always argue, sometimes violently, about them. When Luther said to Calvin, "Your God is my Devil," he was indulging in what to non-Christians seems to be the favorite indoor sport of churchmen. Yet every one of us sometime should decide where he stands, because the answers to these ultimate questions do make vast differences, not only in our lives but in our relationships one with another.

The answer lies in the riddle of what God is like

It is our conviction that the answer to the question of salvation lies in the answer to another, even more fundamental question. We affirm that God is powerful and that He is a loving God. The question is, "How powerful? How loving?" When we decide what we believe about the role of God in salvation, we make, by implication, our decision on what we believe about God Himself, as to the scope of His power and His love.

"What about justice?" someone asks. "Is not God a God of justice? Must not that figure in the equation?" Calvinist, Arminian, and Universalist agree in this, that if justice had the last word in salvation, no man would be saved except Jesus alone. This is the repeated affirmation of the Bible and the constant experience of the saints. Our sole hope for salvation is in the belief that God's judgment is always the servant of his love. Our salvation never rests on justice, it must always depend upon divine grace and compassion. Therefore, the ultimate questions relating to salvation are questions concerning God's love and his power: (1) How much does God love us? (2) To what extent is God able to carry out his will? (That is, how powerful is He?)

Are there limits to God's power? to God's love?

The Calvinist's belief about salvation indicates that he believes God to be limitless in power, but limited in love. The whole Calvinistic system rests upon the cornerstone of the absolute sovereignty of God. Yet nothing can hide the fact that, according to the Calvinist position, this all-powerful God purposed in his creation to save some and to damn to eternal torment more than He saves. To say that He loves those eternally damned as much as the saved cannot be reconciled with the doctrine of divine omnipotence. There is no satisfactory answer to the question, "Why does God damn so many if He is unlimited in power?" except to say, "He loved not those He damned."

The Arminian's belief about salvation, on the other hand, implies that God is limitless in love, but limited in power. John Wesley, a disciple of Arminius, has given us some of the supreme expressions of the love of God. Every human being, under this doctrine, has a chance of eternal salvation. God's love is to rich and poor, to white and black and yellow and red, to male and female, to strong and weak; to every person who lives, God's love goes out in Christ. Every person makes the decision himself whether

to accept or reject this love. There is no doubt at all that the Arminian believes God to be limitless in love. Then comes the question, "If God is limitless in love why does not every person finally come to salvation?" The question is not answered when the Arminian says, "He who is not saved chooses not to be saved. His damnation is not God's fault but his own." This answer is not really honest, for there are millions who never in all their lives hear the name of Jesus spoken except as an oath. To say that these have a chance equal to others brought up in Christian homes is just not true to reality. The question is still unanswered, "Why does not the God of limitless love ultimately save all his children?" The fact is that, by the Arminian's own teaching, God's limitless love is able to save only those who accept it in this lifetime. Surely such a God must wish this were not so, must be the prisoner of this limitation (whether self-imposed or not), and must be doomed to eternal longing for the eternally lost.

We repeat, the Calvinist doctrine of salvation implies belief that God is limitless in power, but limited in love. The doctrine of the Arminian implies that God is limitless in love, but limited in power.

It follows next that, if God is absolutely unlimited in both love and power, the Universalist must be right as to the final answer to the question of salvation. Unless man's finite and mortal stubbornness is greater than God's infinite and immortal love, the time will come when "at the name of Jesus every knee (shall) bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue (shall) confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:10). The Universalist position affirms that the divine love never fails forever, that, because God is absolute in both love and power, his purpose of salvation cannot be forever stayed.

Each must find his own answer

While Christians are bound to disagree on this question, and different readers of these lines will come to different conclusions as to the faith by which they must live, it must be obvious by now that the writer is, in the last analysis, aligned with the Universalists. However, in setting forth our own opinions about salvation it will become equally apparent that we owe much also to the Calvinists and Arminians.

We wrote at the head of this chapter a verse from I Timothy which affirms that the living God is "the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe."

The Calvinist would say that this promise is abrogated by the sin of the damned.

The Arminian would say, "God is the Savior of all men, *potentially,* in that each man has a chance for salvation during his lifetime—a chance which he may or may not take." We would agree with that statement as far as it goes, and it goes only as far as the death of the earthly body. Our conviction is that the Almighty God, the Father, being infinite in both power and love, would not begin anything He could not finish, would not allow his eternal plan to be thwarted by an incident as small as the death of a body He created in the first place. We believe that, in the last analysis, the Universalists are right. We believe this not only because of God's power and love, but because of his justice as well. Otherwise there is no hope for the millions who, because they were born in the jungles of Africa or Malaya or New York City or Middletown, or to parents whose lives are full of darkness "blacker than that which fills the grave," have no chance worth mentioning to find salvation in this life. Abraham was right (Genesis 18:25). The God of justice will not do wrong. Every soul will have his fair chance. And if he does not take that chance, he will have another one at least as many times as Jesus bade Peter to forgive (Matthew 18:21).

But this is not the whole story, and we beg you to withhold your judgment until we have stated our debt to Calvinists and Arminians.

While the God of strict Calvinist teaching is morally far beneath Jesus, we must admit that the Arminians could be right, at that. It may be that the God of justice and love is not limitless in power. Perhaps his creation has gotten out of hand to such a degree that many precious lives must be lost so that a few may be saved. If this is so, God is still supremely to be loved. But we do not believe it is so.

Here we call the Calvinists as our witnesses. They will testify to the great truth affirmed and reaffirmed by the Bible and by the whole family of faith in all the monotheistic world, "God is supreme! God is Almighty! God is alpha and omega, the beginning and ending, King of kings and Lord of lords, and He shall reign forever and forever!" If it seems strange for a Universalist to call a Calvinist as a friendly witness, we point out that their disagreement is not at the point of God's sovereignty. We thank the Calvinist for his steadfast affirmation that God is supreme over all. Our quarrel with the Calvinist is that he exalts God's judgment above his love. It is his sad conclusion that the fate of most is to be felled by God's judgment before they can be saved by his love. We affirm again that, in the end, God's judgment must ever be the instrument of his love, for God *is* love (I John 4:8).

But while we are discussing the judgment of God, let us issue a loud warning against any easy and quick Universalism which omits hell, the fruit of sin. When some Universalists say, "All men are children of God," we desert to the Calvinists and say, "Not so! All men are sons of the devil, and can become sons of God only by a radical transformation in which their affections are turned inside out and they become lovers of God and man instead of lovers of self. Until this occurs they are under judgment." No fact of human nature is any clearer than this, that the

selfish concern which "comes naturally" to us all will damn us and those we love to a living hell until we learn to love not ourselves but God and our neighbors. We made this plain earlier in this chapter when we discussed God's judgment of nations and individuals. There is no reason to support the claim that this condition will not continue after death.

There is a point in this three-way discussion where we find ourselves in agreement with the Arminians, too. This is when they affirm the essential importance of the free offering of the self to Christ. In this sense, theoretically, damnation can be eternal. As long as man loves himself first, he sins, and when he sins he incurs the judgment of God, and finds himself sooner or later lost, separate from God, in hell. Until of his own free will he rejects self-indulgence and turns his affection toward God in answer to his forgiveness, he will remain in hell. Certainly this state can and does often last throughout the span of earthly life. Possibly it could last a thousand years. Theoretically, it could last forever. To this extent we agree with the Arminians. Our contention is, however, that the God who is "from everlasting to everlasting" has forever in which to accomplish his purpose of salvation. We know not what the afterlife is like. It is quite probable that if we deny the invitation of God's love here, He may make it easier there for us to see the difference between the life of self-love and the life of God-love. At any rate, we believe that the infinite love of the infinite Father will pursue us infinitely. How long? Until we answer his love with ours. And maybe the Calvinist doctrine of predestination is right to the extent that God knows us so well He can predict the moment in eternity when we will turn to Him.

Our answer draws upon all three traditional schools

From the Calvinists we learn that God is Sovereign over his creation. His will can be delayed, but it cannot be

thwarted. We also learn the terrible reality of his judgment, the painful fruits of which go on even after God has blotted out the sin that brought it about. Everywhere we look, on the desolate land, in ruined cities, on the bodies of little children, we can see the wounds of past sins that will not be erased.

From the Arminians we learn the lesson of the freedom of man and the desperate importance of this life we now live. For this is the only life we shall ever live on this earth, the only time in eternity we shall have this kind of a chance at salvation. We learn also that man is free not only to accept God's invitation to salvation, but to reject it. And we are sure this freedom to reject will never be violated by the God who wants our love, not our submission—no, not in all eternity.

With the Universalists we accept the idea of Calvin that God is absolutely powerful and the idea of Arminius that God is absolutely loving. We believe there is no hell to which He will not follow us, suffering with us in fatherly concern, offering us in every "far country" the chance to "come to ourselves" as did the prodigal son (Luke 15:11 ff.). And at some time in eternity there will be no lost sons, for every one will be saved at last.

"... especially of those who believe"

The salvation that the living God offers to all men is almost always brought about by faith in Christ. The roll of Christian saints, martyrs, and heroes who in his name and for his sake have through their lives and deaths brought healing and blessing to the world is the greatest story in all of human history. If we are wise we seek our own salvation in this way, for in joining the company of those who call upon the name of Jesus, we find the perfect outlet for all our talents, the supreme meaning for our lives.

Yet, we must not be overconfident or dogmatic. The important sign of salvation is the life turned inside out,

the self given in love completely to the highest good that self can know. The priest in the novel, *The Keys of the Kingdom,* says, "I know there is at least one atheist in heaven." He refers to the physician who was his lifelong friend and opponent in argument who, while he never believed in God, went to China and gave his life in fighting the plague there. Mahatma Gandhi put most Christians to shame with his selfless life, and he doesn't fit our pattern. Our obligation is to love, and to be true to the highest we know. To God belongs the final reckoning.

The Christian who follows Jesus comes to "trust . . . the living God who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe."

The cosmos in which we live is not dead but alive. Our faith is not in idols which must be carried from place to place because they are dead. We worship God, the very Soul of all reality.

We affirm that to describe Him in any terms less than those which we use in describing personality is to degrade Him. He is much more, to be sure, but He is at least as marvelous as his most sublime creature.

Moses and the prophets teach us that He is a just, moral God. Jesus teaches us to call Him "our Father," and to give ourselves to Him with abandon in the way that Jesus himself gave his life for us. This we must do because our lives are never fulfilled until they are spent in God's service. This we rejoice in doing because we have faith in God, the mighty Savior of all men. They that live and labor for God do not live nor labor in vain, for God's purpose cannot fail.

I said to a man who stood at the gate of the year:
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into
the unknown!"
And he replied, "Go out into the darkness
And put your hand into the Hand of God.
That shall be to you better than light, and
Safer than a known way."

—M. Louise Haskins

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Is it not utterly presumptuous for mere men to believe in a "personal" God?*
2. *Why has philosophical and scientific opinion turned away from mechanistic toward organic interpretations of the cosmos?*
3. *Have you seen God's judgment at work in the world? In your town? In your life?*
4. *Do God's judgment and his love ever conflict?*
5. *Does God make tornadoes? If not, what else in God's creation is beyond his control? If so, how do we justify faith in a God of love?*
6. *What do you believe about salvation? Who is saved? Who isn't? What part of your belief would please a Calvinist? An Arminian? A Universalist?*
7. *What is the relationship between faith and salvation? Between love and salvation? Between faith and love?*

3 *The Christian Abides in the Holy Spirit*

I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh....
—Acts 2:17

This chapter must begin with an effort to describe the Trinity, the ancient Christian doctrine that the one God comes to us in three different roles: as Father, as Son, and as Holy Spirit. We do not propose to go into the unending complications into which the controversies of the centuries have twisted this idea. St. Augustine commented in effect, "If we don't believe in the Trinity, we are damned. If we try to understand the Trinity, we go crazy." It is our purpose only to sketch the broad outlines, indicating briefly how this formula can be helpful to us in our effort to know God and to make contact with Him.

One helpful reminder is the formula of "the three H's": God the Father, God in heaven; God the Son, God in history; God the Holy Spirit, God in the human heart.

When we speak of God the Father we think of that part of God which is like the great part of the iceberg which lies under water, that limitless unknown which we only glimpse through the bit we can see. He is the Creator of the cosmos, the Judge who orders his creation by natural and moral law, the vigilant Provider who watches over his creation with constant, loving concern. He is the living center of all reality from whom all things visible and invisible take their existence, and upon whom we must depend for every breath we take into our lungs and every morsel we receive into our mouths. He is the God beyond our reach whose ways are as high above our ways as the heavens

are high above the earth. Yet, because Jesus has taught us to call Him "Father," we have faith to believe that somehow we are precious to Him.

When we think of God the Son, we contemplate the Christ-deed of God, the ministry of Jesus with all its snowballing results scattered throughout history like living seeds sown by a hurricane.

When Jesus contemplated his departure from the earth he promised his disciples that God would not leave them alone in the world, but would send a Comforter to abide with them in his stead. This Comforter is the Holy Spirit. This name is used to identify God when He is the close mystical Companion of his people. He is the in-dwelling God whom we find when we examine the deep recesses of our own hearts—when they are clean. He is the Inspirer of faith and hope and love. He is also the Creator of purity and peace. We know Him in hours of great joy as the Giver of songs and praise. We know Him in hours of despair as the Giver of songs of consolation. He is God who is seen by the pure in heart, and his voice is conscience.

Of course, these categories lose their meaning altogether when they become the subject of argument. To be sure, the God who lives in the pure heart of the saints is the same God whose love was made manifest in Christ. And He is the same God who created the world. If we try to be hair-splitters as to just which role God is in at the moment, we are likely to lose track of Him altogether. We remember a teacher in a seminary who called himself a "Binitarian" because he held that in the Bible "Holy Spirit" and "Spirit of Christ" mean the same thing, a very common interpretation. If when we use these terms they mean "God," it is very evident that they mean the same reality, and a debate on where one member of the Trinity leaves off and another begins is always fruitless indeed. It is sufficient for our purpose to point out that, from New Testament times until the present, Christians have found their faith enriched by

the use of the trinitarian terminology when describing the one God. We suspect that Christians will do so a thousand years hence. Nor is it surprising that the great God should need more than one name to compass even that part of Him that men can apprehend.

George A. Buttrick speaks of the Trinity in terms of "three great downpourings of the love of God." The first occurred at the Creation, the second at the Nativity, and the third at Pentecost (see Acts 2) when the Holy Spirit made his first appearance to the Church. Certainly these events are central in the establishment of the Christian's relationship with God, and remembrance of them with their great and separate importance will strengthen our ties to Him.

Let us not quibble as to the name by which God should be called on a given occasion. We have heard many discussions at ordaining councils as to whether or not it is proper to use the name "Jesus" in offering a prayer. We would rather not enter such debates. A Roman Catholic prays to "Mary" or "Joseph." We confess that we don't know whether Mary or Joseph hears such prayers or not. If pinned down, we would confess to some skepticism as to whether the saints have such powers. But of this we are sure, God hears the prayers, and if they are offered in faith and holy love they will be answered as surely as prayers presented through proper theological channels.

In the religious experience of the ages, as Christians have reached out after God, they have found God reaching for them in three special ways. Meeting Him in these three roles they have adopted the custom of calling Him a different name for each one: Father, Son, or Holy Spirit.

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son,
And to the Holy Ghost!
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
World without end. Amen! Amen!

The Holy Spirit waits at the peak of Christian life

The achievement of the Christian *life* does not occur until the Christian has made firsthand contact with the Holy Spirit, until he has arrived at the place in his pilgrimage where he can say, "God is by my side day by day." Just as the Holy Spirit was the last of the three manifestations of God to enter history, so He is usually the final one to whom the individual Christian is introduced. We are vaguely aware of God the Father at a very early age. He becomes more real to us after we have met and begun to follow Jesus. But sometimes far more than the fifty days that separated Easter from Pentecost must elapse before we make our own firsthand contact with the God who dwells within.

As St. Paul made his rounds through Asia Minor, he was surprised in Ephesus to come upon some Christians who had not even heard of the Holy Spirit (Acts 19). They knew the God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob. They rejoiced in the good news of Jesus Christ. They had been baptized with the baptism of John the Baptist. But of the Holy Spirit they were ignorant.

Unfortunately, there are many churches in this day who are in a like predicament. Their members understand the Ten Commandments. They have an affectionate regard for Jesus Christ, and try by their own unaided efforts to follow his teachings. But there is no spiritual glow to these churches because they and too often their ministers have no real compelling experience of the God who walks beside them. They find religion a burden and not a joy because they have no immediate assurance of God's presence. They struggle with temptation and are defeated because they do not know the powerful Spirit who waits to add his strength to their weakness. They are filled with dread for want of the firsthand knowledge that they are God's people and He is their God.

Just as the Church was not fully born until the Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit made his entry into history, so also no Christian life is completely begun until communication has been established with the Holy Spirit. This is the goal and the test of the authentic Christian *life.* When Paul was disputing with the Church at Jerusalem on the issue of whether to be accepted as a Christian one must first be accepted as a Jew, he had one telling argument that won the day for freedom of the Church from the Pharisaic code. That argument was in the person of Titus, his young friend. Titus was a Greek, a Gentile, uncircumcised. Yet Titus had the Holy Spirit, as was demonstrated by many proofs in his life. Since it was established that a Gentile had the Holy Spirit, it was proven that a Gentile could be a Christian. The Holy Spirit is the hallmark of the complete Christian.

Who is the Holy Spirit? God. What is the Holy Spirit? Divine Love

Another of the unnecessary arguments that Christians have with one another is on the issue of whether the Holy Spirit should be referred to as "Him" or "it." We used to get very excited about this debate ourselves, taking the "Him" side, until it was pointed out to us by somebody older and wiser than we that St. Paul on various occasions uses both the personal and the impersonal pronouns when speaking of the Holy Spirit.

The fact of the matter is that there is a "who-ness" and a "what-ness" about every person. The "who-ness" concerns his status as a living, loving, self-conscious being. It includes such details as his name, sex, age, and his relationships to other people in family, church, party, and lodge.

The "what-ness" may be very important in understanding a person also. In a human being such matters as the size, shape, and health of his body fall into this category. But this is not all. The limitless sum of facts relating to the

person—his tastes, his likes and dislikes, his habits—are of themselves mere statistics, but when they are apprehended by other persons they can identify a living self. For instance, when the police are hunting a criminal one of the most important things to study besides pictures and fingerprints is the M.O. (method of operation) of various felons known to be at large. Thus, if they find that old ladies are being swindled out of their savings by a couple posing as brother and sister, they may be led immediately to the conclusion that this is the work of Slippery Willie because this is his M.O. It could not be Swindling Sam, also known to be in the neighborhood, because he always works alone.

Although the Holy Spirit is the opposite of any sinner in captivity or at large, He is a person, and in seeking to understand Him we must discover not only his personal identity, his "who-ness", but also we must become acquainted with his "what-ness" as well. When we say, "The Holy Spirit is another name for God," we have covered the matter of his "who-ness" rather well. Immediately, we know his name. We know that as a person He is unique and supreme, bearing no relationship to any human being except as He has made Jesus Christ a peculiar channel into human history of his presence. His relationship to all men is that of Creator, Father, Judge, and Savior. This is "who" the Holy Spirit is.

The question, "What is the Holy Spirit?" is also relevant. As we look about us in the world, by what signs are we to know, "Lo, here is the Holy Spirit"? We have already made plain that the Holy Spirit resides in the human heart that will receive Him. His place of labor and life is the spirit of man. His assigned task in the trinitarian division of labor is to be the Comforter and Guide of men and women and children. The conscience is his voice. But the most important thing we can say about the "what-ness" of the Holy Spirit is that He is divine love. Wherever He is present, self-giving, overflowing, unilateral, undeserved,

holy love will be present. And wherever we find this kind of love the Holy Spirit is there.

To the believer this becomes one of the most reassuring arguments for the abiding presence of God in human life. Looking into his own life and into the tragic tale of human history he knows that this kind of love is not human. "To err is human, to forgive divine." The stimulus-response pattern of the creature has no place in it for a thing like the love of Christ. Yet, here it is. It crops up where least expected, and it will not disappear. But it is a personal attribute. Love is not produced in a test tube nor raised on a farm. Because it is beyond the human, it must be of God. Where divine love is, there is God. Where God is there is divine love. Again we suggest the reading of the fourth chapter of the First Epistle of John to clear up our clumsy way of expressing this great truth.

Through the Holy Spirit, we make personal contact with God

The hunger after personal knowledge of God is universal. Every man at times seeks to enlist the aid of that-which-is-beyond-sense, whether he knows enough to call upon God or not. Every primitive culture has its religion with the rites and taboos by which the spirit or spirits are entreated to be favorable to men. We can still watch the rain dances of the American Indians and the weird voodoo rituals of the West Indies.

We do not often realize how much a part of the sensate modern culture such practices are, yet if we open our eyes, we can see heathen rites being performed on all sides. A major league baseball pitcher blows on his fingers and touches the third button on his shirt before each pitch. He would no more think of throwing the ball before performing this ritual than he would purposely groove an easy strike to the league's leading slugger. This is an incantation to something called "luck," a request for help from

beyond himself without which he is afraid he cannot succeed. Baseball players are not the only latter-day would-be sorcerers either. So also are the salesman who "knocks on wood" before calling up the prospect about the "big deal," the housewife who crosses her fingers before opening the oven door for the first look at that special cake, the student who wears his vest backward when he goes in for the final examination for which he is none-too-well prepared, and a hundred others we encounter every day. Man, in his mortality, has a chronic awareness of the fact that the cosmos is too much for his own unaided strength, and the ways in which he tries to overcome this deficit are limitless in number.

How great is his wondering joy, therefore, when he discovers that the God who made him, who orders the rolling spheres in their orbits, and who sends forth the seasons at their proper times, the very Soul of reality, is concerned with him as an individual enough to want to establish Person-to-person communication with him. Nowhere is this awful delight described more vividly than in the story of the boy Samuel as told in the Old Testament (I Samuel 3). The child had been left at the Temple by his mother, Hannah, to be the servant of God and Eli, the priest. In the middle of the night he heard a voice calling his name. He thought it was Eli summoning him, but after several wakings by the eager lad, the old priest realized that Samuel was indeed being called by One higher than he. Following Eli's instruction, Samuel went back to sleep, to wait again for the Voice. When it came his answer was a quick, "Speak, Lord, for thy servant heareth." In that moment began a divine-human partnership that was to make Samuel second only to Moses as the beloved temporal and spiritual leader of his people.

Samuel, Jesus, Joan of Arc, and Stephen are among those who have heard the audible Voice. But even though this is a privilege granted only to the spiritual genius, any human

being can have God for a friend, can with certitude know God as his comrade as surely as he knows any earthly person. As Peter said on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), this was what Joel meant when he prophesied that the day would come when God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh. Jeremiah (Jeremiah 31:31) had an even more graphic glimpse of the culmination of human religious experience. In his famous "New Covenant" passage, he says in effect: "The days are coming, says God, when I shall make a new covenant with my people, not like the one I made with them when I led them out of slavery in Egypt, the one they broke! That one was a covenant of laws written on stone tables. But the new one will be so real that no man will ever have to teach his brother again about Me, for I shall write my Law not on stone, but on their hearts, and every one of them shall know Me, and I shall be their God, and they shall be my people." This is the foreshadowing of Protestantism, the first affirmation that every human being *can* know God, that society need not be divided into religious and secular classes, that to know the God who lives in his own heart is the birthright of every human being. If life gives us anything less than this supreme encounter, we are being cheated of life's highest prize, man's surest prerogative.

Prayer

The chief vehicle of this personal togetherness between man and God is prayer. And everyone can learn to pray.

The first step in establishing conscious contact with the Holy Spirit is to realize that He is always more eager to hear and to answer our prayers than we are to pray. The barriers which shut Him out are not of his making, but of ours. The blackest doubts are born not of God-made suffering but of manmade pride and man-cherished evil. As the fourth Gospel says, "The Light came into the world, but men loved the darkness instead of the Light because their

deeds were evil" (John 3:19). Of this we may be sure, when the barriers we have erected against Him are removed by us He will be glad to enter our lives—as glad as we shall be to receive Him.

Sometimes He breaks his way in whether invited or not. Usually He remains apart until invited. But, like the music that hovers all around us in the air waves unheard until we turn on our radios and tune them, God is with us, about us, in us whether we perceive Him or not.

Richard E. Byrd, the explorer, wrote a book entitled *Alone* about a winter he spent far from any human contact in Antarctica. He placed himself in this outpost to observe and record weather conditions, and was unseen by his crew for several months. One searches the book in vain for any mention of God, and puts it down as an interesting treatise on the psychology of solitude. But in speaking of the book afterward to a churchman, Admiral Byrd said, "I am not a religious man, and did not try to put my deepest experiences into the book for fear they would not be rightly understood. You, being a churchman, will understand when I tell you that I was not alone for one instant during those months." The Unseen Presence had saved him many times in the long and perilous darkness.

A thrilling story is told by a man trained in theology and psychology who has a private practice as a consulting psychologist. A woman in her thirties came to him. She was desperate. The bottom had dropped out of her life. She counted herself an atheist, but as an alternative to suicide she was willing to try anything. The counsellor heard her story, full of one personal tragedy after another. She was a well-educated woman with a fine mind. If she had lost most other virtues, she was at least absolutely honest. She prided herself on having a scientific respect for truth. The counsellor made her a sporting proposition. He asked her to try a scientific experiment, "I dare you to sit alone in a room in silence for thirty minutes at a stretch

every day for thirty days. You can have your Bible with you if you like, but no other reading matter, and no other distractions. Wait for God to come to you."

Her reaction to this proposition was much like that of Naaman (II Kings 5), the Syrian leper, when he went to Elisha the Prophet to be cleansed of his leprosy. Elisha told him to go to the Jordan River and immerse himself seven times. Naaman left in disgust. "In Syria there are clean rivers I could bathe in if that would do any good. I should dip my body in this dirty Jordan? Never!" Fortunately for Naaman, according to the story, he had a wise servant who said, "If the prophet had bidden you do some great thing you would have done it, wouldn't you? Then why not try this easy thing he has advised?" Naaman took the servant's advice and was healed.

So it was with this desperate woman. She thought to herself, "I've had treatments from doctors and psychiatrists who outearn this character five times, and they didn't do any good. Why should I listen to this pious drivel?" Yet, because she had no other recourse, because she was desperate, she agreed to try the experiment. She went home and arranged a small room with a chair and a table and a Bible and nothing else. That day she began her lonely vigils. At first she was sure she was going crazy. A half hour is not a long time, yet when one is alone with nothing to distract attention from this fact, it can seem like eternity. But the lady was not only honest, she was also stubborn, and she had resolved to see this thing through if it killed her. She began to open the Bible at random simply to drive away the loneliness. Ten days went by and nothing happened except that she got very tired of the meaningless routine. But then it began to be different. On the twenty-seventh day she returned to the counsellor with a radiant face. It had happened. That day as she had sat alone in her little room she had suddenly realized that she was not alone after all. In a way that cannot be explained by any

human logic, the Presence became known. The Holy Spirit had passed the barrier of awareness and this woman, while not wholly healed in that instant, was started back on her way to health and usefulness.

The promise of Jesus in the New Testament is that all who seek find, and that to all who knock the door shall be opened (Matthew 7:8). This is the experience of many millions of ordinary folks down through the ages who make common testimony that these promises are from God, who does not make them in vain.

How do we seek? How do we knock?

Learning to pray is a good deal like learning to swim. In both instances the final victory is one of establishing faith. Any of us who learned to swim late enough in life to remember it will recall the routine. We dutifully submerged our heads at the behest of the instructor who told us we must do this to dispel our fear of the water. Then we put our hands out over our heads and lay face down on the water, learning to do what was not too reassuringly called "the dead man's float." Then, grasping the edge of the pool firmly with our hands, we kicked vigorously with our feet, obediently imitating the scissors to the best of our ability. After this we anchored our feet on the shore and frantically churned the water with our hands, proving that it was possible to keep the bow up as well as the stern. Then, leaving terra firma altogether we put the two motions together, and, arms and legs flailing desperately, we started out to sea, only to feel our keels scrape the bottom of the pool after a few strokes. Then, without much faith, but with a stubborn persistence, we started the whole procedure over again—and again. For some the victory came early, for others it was delayed. But to all of us who stuck to it, the victory came, and a sweet one it was. Suddenly, one day, perhaps when we least expected it, we relaxed, gave ourselves to the water, and *swam!* Nobody

can say what it was he did that time that was different from what he had done all the times before. He just did the same old things, but instead of sinking he did not sink. And from that day until the day we die we can swim. Why? Because we know we have swum. A naturalist once observed that if a certain water beetle should pause in walking on the water to wonder what keeps him up he would sink. He must keep going to float, and not ask questions. It is something like this for human beings, too.

Learning to pray is the same routine all over again. We resolutely set aside certain times each day for prayer, as Jesus teaches us, alone with the Father who sees in secret (Matthew 6:4). Then we "say prayers." At first it can be a futile, meaningless business. We stick to it only because our mothers would be unhappy if we didn't. Then we have a great need, and forgetting our set prayers, we offer our great need to God. Even then sometimes we do not know whether anybody hears or not. But as we keep splashing away in the pool even when we know we can't swim, so we keep on with our prayers. As Dr. John W. Brush says, "We beat our fists upon the gates of heaven until our knuckles are raw." As we are encouraged in our efforts to swim by watching others who can do it, so we are encouraged in our prayers by the great devotional literature of the Church and by the prayers of others who pray with conviction. Then, sometimes sooner, sometimes later, at long last there comes the moment as we pray when it is no longer a secondhand experience we share. Our Day of Pentecost arrives and as we pray the Holy Spirit surrounds and invades us. In that moment we know that He was always there, without our knowing it. Then our prayers become different. They are no longer one-way conversations but have become two-way communions. To be sure, the experience of prayer is unlike swimming in that there will be times of famine when the doubt and darkness will return. But even these times will be different because they

will be full of the fragrant expectancy of the Spirit's sure return.

What is fit subject matter for prayer? What do we say to God? Do we pray for rain when it is dry? Do we pray for people to get well when they are sick? Can we pray for people across the world from us who do not pray for themselves? Do we bother God with our little problems?

The answer to these questions is a part of the whole matter of Christian discipleship. If we are good disciples, we will pray "through Jesus Christ our Lord"; that is, according to the spirit and intent of Jesus as well as by his unique authority. It is very likely that sometimes we shall mention all the things implied in the questions asked above. Certainly, God being our Father, anything of importance to us is of importance to Him, and anything upon which our lives depend is a fit matter to be lifted up to Him in prayer.

There will be certain matters about which we shall pray every day. These are best outlined in our Lord's Prayer (Matthew 6:9 ff.). In fact, one very good way of establishing the habit of daily personal prayer is to pray the Lord's Prayer during the time that we most devote to praying, and to pause after each section of this prayer to elaborate on it according to the particular needs of the day.

"Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name." All praying must begin with the consciousness that it is to God we look, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Almighty, the beginning and the ending. We adore Him with fumbling phrases, but with our humble hearts bowed down for Him to lift them up.

"Thy Kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." This is not our world but God's. If He is our Father we can trust Him better than we can trust ourselves to make of it a good thing. This petition in this prayer is proof positive that Christianity is interested in the world of the here and now. We not only wait for

heaven, we ask God to make heaven on earth. If we pray it while offering ourselves, this prayer can be a great lever for human betterment.

"Give us this day our daily bread." Jesus spoke to people who were poor, who knew what it was to be hungry and hot and cold and in pain. It was his belief that God is concerned with the needs of the body and he taught us to pray for these needs.

"And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors." This is one of the most chastening prayers we can offer. When we feel the world has given us a raw deal or that somebody has wronged us there is nothing that will bring us to our senses any more abruptly than to pray this prayer with our minds really open to what it says. Here we ask God to forgive us what we owe Him, to forgive us for betraying Him a hundred times by coldhearted avoidance of human need and by easy surrender to temptation, to forgive us for being a cheap imitation of what He made us to be. And we ask Him to forgive us *only as far as we have forgiven those who have wronged us!* Jesus deliberately forces us to compare the treatment we want from God with the treatment we are willing to accord, not our friends, but our enemies. If there is anything that can make it easy to adopt an attitude of Christian charity, it is the realization of the relationship of these two debts, the debt we owe God and the debt owed us by our fellows. This comparison day by day will reveal our real status in relation to God and men in a way no other prayer can. If we don't ardently want to be Christian to other people after praying this prayer, we have not prayed it honestly.

"And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil." While present evil can be overcome by God and transformed into future good, it is not to be sought. Rather, it is our natural enemy to be striven against. We pray that God will spare us, as even Jesus prayed in Gethsemane to be spared from the cross. We trust Him to be our Deliverer

from every peril, but we trust Him to deliver us in his own way. "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done" (Mark 14:36).

"For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever, Amen." We finish where we began with songs of praise to our Maker.

The Lord's prayer gives us the perfect outline, and the key to the things that should be the daily subject of our conversations with God. There is one omission from the prayer, namely, the step of intercession, of prayer for others. Jesus prayed for others, and assumes that we will do the same. Perhaps such prayers will be included under the "Thy will be done" heading if we use the Lord's Prayer as an outline. Of course, there will be infinite variations on the theme, and many things added by the urgency of the day.

The proper attitude in prayer

Two things need to be said about the proper attitude in prayer. The first essential is the attitude of wondering expectancy. Some people, whose imaginations have been stifled at the end of childhood, seek as if there were nothing to find at all, knock as if there were nobody home. Knowing that, as Tennyson makes King Arthur say, "more things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of," we begin to pray (if we begin aright) like refugee children transported miraculously to Macy's toy department. We know the wondrous truth and power that have entered history through the minds of men on their knees: the Law of Moses, the living messages of the prophets, the Sermon on the Mount, the inner strength of men like Lincoln and Gandhi. When we pray, we enter the Holy of Holies in which Pompey found nothing but in which the faithful have found God. He is there. Or at least a well of spiritual riches is there which has blessed the world since the dawn of life, and those who have tapped it say that it flows from

the Presence of God. This much is not subject to reasonable doubt. With this truth in mind we will pray expectantly, with a well-founded anticipation that, when we open the doors, God will come in.

The second essential in prayer is the attitude of trusting self-commitment. The question, "Will the prayer be answered?" is not in order. All prayers are answered. Sometimes the answer is yes, sometimes no, sometimes "wait and see," but there is always an answer. And if we pray aright, we pray in the belief that whatever the answer is it will be the best answer for us and for God's perfect purpose. We learn to swim when we yield our bodies to the water in the faith that it will hold us up. We learn to pray when we have learned to yield our whole selves, body, mind, and spirit, to God in confident trust that He can and will care for us better than we can possibly care for ourselves. Sometimes He will punish us by answering our foolish prayers. Sometimes, when our prayers are noble, He will amaze us by the ways in which He helps us. Sometimes, even when we pray for good things, we will be bitterly disappointed. But always we will know that He surrounds us, that we abide in Him. And again, all our prayers will have the same ending as that of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane, "Nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done."

So when we pray, we will not fear to take anything important to our Heavenly Father. We will use the Lord's Prayer as our pattern and guide, and besides the petitions of that great prayer we will follow the example of Jesus in praying for others, interceding with God for those whose need for Him is especially great. We will pray with expectancy, with earnestness, and with joy. And we will begin and end all our praying by committing our lives and the lives of all we love into his hands who "loves us all as if we were one, and each as if he were the only one in the world."

This is the supreme affirmation of the Christian gospel, that the God who created the cosmos and all that is in it, the God who reveals his power in the natural and moral law, who makes his ways known to the faithful who follow Jesus Christ and read the Holy Scriptures, this Holy God chooses to make himself known to individual human beings who seek Him and selects the hearts of men for his dwelling place.

The magnitude of this assertion—its utter presumptuousness—is staggering. Yet the company of those who have testified to its truth makes it impossible for a fair-minded man to dismiss it without thorough tests of its validity.

Christians call God by the name Holy Spirit when He makes Himself known to them in this intimate, personal way. This name distinguishes this role played by God from others in which He is known as the Father and the Son. Like any personality, the Holy Spirit has a "who-ness" and a "what-ness." The "who-ness" is the one God. The "what-ness" is the divine self-giving love whose voice is conscience and whose power is the full Christian *life*.

The chief vehicle by which the Holy Spirit makes Himself known to individuals is prayer, although this is not the only means by which He operates. It will be recalled that He made his entrance upon the stage of history upon the Day of Pentecost to the assembled Chuch. He is most often found by individuals in the company of the Church, and particularly at the time of the sharing of the Lord's Supper. (Here let us not quibble as to whether "Holy Spirit" or "Spirit of Christ" is the best name to denote the divine Presence in corporate worship. It is God whatever we call Him.) Sometimes the Holy Spirit acts in surprising and unexpected ways to make Himself known to men. Any man can know Him if he approaches Him in faithful expectancy as a disciple of Jesus Christ. Individual prayer and the fellowship of the Church at worship are the two most fruitful ways of "seeking and knocking."

To know the Holy Spirit and abide in Him is to know the abundant *life* of the Christian.

In the castle of my soul
Is a little postern gate,
Whereat, when I enter,
I am in the presence of God.
In a moment, in the turning of a thought,
I am where God is.
This is a fact.

—RAUSCHENBUSCH

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *How can we believe in the Trinity and yet say, "God is One"?*
2. *Have you ever seen the Holy Spirit at work? Can you think of instances in recorded history when you are convinced the Holy Spirit was present?*
3. *Does our church know only the "baptism of John" or have we "received the Holy Spirit"?*
4. *Is there a connection between praying and swearing?*
5. *Is it true that "he who seeks finds"—always?*
6. *If God knows our needs before we ask, why should we pray?*
7. *Isn't intercessory prayer meddling in God's business?*
8. *What elements should daily prayer include? Are there things which should not be included in prayer?*
9. *How should we go about learning to pray?*

4 *The Christian Serves the Church and the Kingdom*

As Thou didst send me into the world, so have I sent them into the world.

—John 17:18

Christianity is not a religion that is willing to give the world up as a bad job. There are some religions of the East which are called "world-denying" because escape from the world is their stated goal. They hold that our world is beyond redemption, a hopeless jungle of evil which must be totally rejected by the people of God. Sometimes Christians have taken this attitude and "gone apart" to monasteries. And in their support it must be said that Christianity does have some harsh things to say about the world as it is. Jesus demands some basic and radical changes not only within human beings, but in the ways in which human beings live with one another. Yet when all this has been allowed, it must still be affirmed that Christianity is a "world-affirming" religion. Our faith teaches us that the events of this life have an eternal significance. They are not just "play acting." They have a relationship to that which is everlasting both as cause and effect. Christianity teaches that the plight of man is not hopeless. There is something that can be done about it. And it is the obligation of the Christian to help God do that something.

The key word in all this is "mission." This word comes from the Latin word *mitto,* "I send." Just before the Second World War there was a movement afoot among world statesmen of the Christian Church to stop using this word. Cartoonists had ridiculed it with so many cannibal

pictures, and our secularistic society had so belittled it that "missionary" had become a term of derision in many quarters. Then, in World War II, two things happened. The Air Forces adopted the word "mission" to designate an expedition over enemy territory, and it so came to mean something both dangerous and important. And, particularly in the Southwest Pacific area, the missionary enterprise of the Church was discovered by Allied fighting men. The "fuzzy-wuzzy angels" of the islands whose ancestors had been head-hunters, and who would have been such themselves if it had not been for a century of heroic missionary endeavor, turned out to be life instead of death for hundreds of fliers and foot soldiers wounded and far from their bases. These men learned the meaning of "Christian missions" in a way that a thousand Sunday school sessions could never have taught it to them. As one wounded and rescued Marine put it in a letter home, "Dear Mom, Today I was feasted instead of feasted upon by the people of these islands because of missionaries." So today *mission* and *missionary* have once more captured their old meaning. A mission is an important and thrilling task that a missionary is sent to do.

Christianity as a world movement is summed up in the text at the head of this chapter. God sent Jesus into the world to perform a mission. Jesus did his part of it, then sent his disciples to finish it. Thus, Jesus was a missionary sent from God, and every Christian is a missionary sent by Christ. Nobody can be a complete Christian alone, insulated from his fellowmen. Even in a solitary prison, he will pray for others. We are sent into the world to do a work of vital importance to God.

The World Mission of Christianity is embodied in two concepts: The Kingdom of God, and the Church

When Jesus laid down his adz and his plane to begin his ministry, the first thing he said that was recorded is, "Re-

pent, for the kingdom of God is at hand!" (Mark 1:15). This phrase, *kingdom of God,* appears again in the first three Gospels like the theme in a symphony. (In Matthew it is kingdom of *heaven.*) To put it in the most simple terms possible, this phrase means "rule of God" as God governs either the individual soul of a man or the total affairs of the world.

Once more we come to one of the ancient and fruitless arguments of the Church. Ever since there were Christians, the discussion has gone on as to whether the Kingdom begins now or in eternity, after this world's time is gone. The fact is that, in this instance as in most arguments among Christians, both sides are right, and in essentials there is no real disagreement. Jesus himself said at various times, "the kingdom . . . is in the midst of you" and "my kingdom is not of this world" (Luke 17:21), (John 18:36). He meant what he said on both occasions. There is a sense in which the Kingdom is beyond this world in both time and space, but there is also a sense in which the Kingdom is "at hand" where we can reach out and touch it. And, believe it or not, it is not difficult to understand how this can be.

The Old Testament prophets liked to talk about the "Day of the Lord." This concept had many meanings. It was connected with the hope of Israel for freedom from oppression and vindication in the face of their enemies. Abraham's children expected a day when the ancient kingdom of David would be reinstated by the miraculous intervention of God in history. It would be a greater kingdom than David's, however. His descendant, the "Messiah" (Anointed One), would sit on the throne in Jerusalem and rule the world as an earthly potentate. To be an Israelite in that day would be almost as good as being an Aryan in Hitler's heaven. But the prophets were quick and almost unanimous to attack the notion in its original form. They declared that the Day of the Lord would be a day of moral judgment, when the sins of the powerful would be pun-

ished and the weak and oppressed would be vindicated. The day was also described as one of great natural catastrophe in which destruction would rain from the skies and the wrath of God would be revealed.

When John the Baptist predicted the coming of the one whose shoelace he would not be worthy to untie, he was thinking in traditional prophetic terms. He foresaw the cataclysm, the end of the world, the new order in which the Messiah of God would rule in righteousness. He universalized the notion, to be sure. When his hearers said, "We don't need to repent, we're Abraham's sons!" (Matthew 3:7ff.) he replied, "God could make Abraham's sons out of these stones. The important thing in the Kingdom will be repentance, holy living, and good deeds." When Jesus came to hear him preach and to be baptized by him in the Jordan, John became convinced that Jesus was the One about whom he had preached. He fully expected Jesus to become the ruler of the world, and he went into Herod's dungeon with that expectation. When months passed and it didn't happen he became uneasy and sent his messengers to ask Jesus, "Are you he who is to come, or shall we look for another?" (Luke 7:19ff.).

Jesus' answer to this query gives us some idea of his own notion about the Kingdom. Quoting prophecy with which he knew John to be familiar, he said, "Go and tell John what you hear and see: the blind receive their sight and the lame walk, lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have the good news preached to them. And blessed is he who takes no offense at me." These were deeds to be expected of the Messiah. John was to be reassured and leave the method of establishing the Kingdom up to Jesus.

Jesus would in all likelihood give some such answer to a modern disciple who might ask for an explanation of the "kingdom of God." The Kingdom is life under the reign of God wherever and whenever it appears. In the Sermon

on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6, and 7) the laws and mores of this reign are outlined with devastating clarity. It is a Kingdom where love, divine love, is all the law there is, where the violation of love is a crime long before it becomes overt in deeds. It is a Kingdom where human sham is revealed for what it is, where the meek, the poor, the humble, and the merciful receive the reward of their faithfulness in the knowledge that they are God's people. This is what is meant by the Kingdom.

The Kingdom is both today and forever

In one way the Kingdom can begin any minute, anywhere. Whenever a man or a woman or a little child become's God's person, the Kingdom comes to earth, and it stays as long as this relationship is maintained. The world is God's Kingdom so far as his reign is recognized and obeyed in the world. And the wider over the world's surface this reign can be extended, the more like heaven the world will become.

Yet, in another way the Kingdom is "not of this world." First, it is an invasion from outside when it comes, coming not from the world but from God through Jesus Christ. And secondly, it will be around long after the world has served its purpose and been discarded. While the world is finite and temporal, the Kingdom is infinite and eternal. When Jesus describes the last judgment or talks about the difference between life in this world and life in the Kingdom, he is speaking of an era of history which will not begin while this world endures for us. The ancient prophecies of the new age when the Messiah* will rule all people as

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* "Messiah," a Hebrew word meaning "Anointed One," is translated in Greek and Latin by a word from which the English word "Christ" is derived. Hence, "Messiah" and "Christ" are synonyms.

David once ruled in Jerusalem must wait the fulfillment of God's purpose for this world. But the prophecies of the Messiah who heals and preaches, the divine ambassador to the poor, these and more are fulfilled every time Jesus touches another life right here in this world.

So the Kingdom is both today and forever, it is "in our midst" yet "not of this world," it is known wherever God rules in a human life or in a company of believers, it can begin today, but it will not be completely fulfilled until every human being knows God as his Father.

The Church is the Christian fellowship within the Kingdom. The ways in which the Church and the Kingdom overlap, and the ways in which they are not the same can be made very complicated by anybody who desires to split theological hairs. It is not within the scope of this little volume to try to untangle them. Suffice it to say that for the most part the Church and the Kingdom are within the same personal boundaries as far as this world is concerned. The Kingdom is made up of all who know the rule of God, and some who do not acknowledge this fact but who are nevertheless the vehicles of divine love. The Church is the visible company of the disciples of Jesus Christ, the Son.

The Church taps the tremendous power of fellowship

The power of the Church is the power of *fellowship,* the fellowship of the faithful with one another, but more than this, the fellowship of the faithful with Christ, the object of their faith.

On the purely natural level, we are all familiar with the many ways in which the interaction of different elements releases power. We have seen in the high school chemistry laboratory what happens when a piece of sodium is dropped into a pan of water. And at the opposite extreme we have seen on our television screens the horrible mushroom-shaped cloud that indicates the interaction of the elements in a nuclear bomb.

Yet, the power of interacting elements is nothing compared to the power released by the interaction of living persons who are united in fellowship behind a common purpose and a common faith.

There was a time when Nazism was nothing but a fellowship around a table in a beer hall. A look at that fellowship in session would give us far less sense of foreboding than to look at a lump of uranium. But the political forces set in motion by that small group of ambitious and ruthless men have left Europe a shambles.

The same could be said of the small group of men who began the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia half a century ago. What at that time was a queer idea propounded by a few queer people willing to die for it has become a flaming faith that has consumed nearly half the world and gained more converts in 35 years than Christianity gained in 350 years at its beginning. History is living testimony to the fact that there is hardly a limit to what can be done by people banded together in fellowship for a common cause. The fruits of the power of fellowship are as good or as evil as the people involved.

Victor Herbert had something when he wrote,

". . . there's nothing in the world can halt or mar a plan
When stouthearted men can stand together man to man."

The Church is a fellowship on the human level, *plus*. Its history is the most amazing tale of the power of fellowship in all human experience. It makes the other movements begun by man seem short-lived because its source and goal are in the God who stands at the beginning and the end of history. Other enterprises may seem greater than the Church in their day, but nothing more true was ever said than, "The Church is an anvil that has worn out many hammers." When Jonathan and his armor-bearer set out all by themselves after the whole Philistine army, Jonathan said, "Nothing can stop God from saving by many or few" (I Samuel 14:6). The story of the Church is full of the

power released when a few gather together in common faith to serve God. The limit of the result is always a limit of the devotion and willingness of the people, never a limit to the power of God.

When the Twelve gathered with their Master in the upper room for their Last Supper, if an invisible observer had offered the opinion that the fellowship begun there would outlast the Roman Empire, he would have been regarded as insane. The apostles were plain men, understanding but little of Jesus' instruction. One of them was a traitor who had already sold out their leader. On the human level, the chances for the survival of any formal society founded by this group would be regarded as utterly insignificant. Yet the Church has survived not only the fall of Rome but also the rise and fall of a dozen such empires. And every time the Church gathers for worship, especially when that Supper is celebrated again, all the power present in that first meeting is with us still if we will only receive it.

Within the great story of power for good released through the fellowship of the Church, there are an infinite number of little stories that go to make up the greater saga. One of these is the haystack story. In the first decade of the nineteenth century, a few Williams College students were caught by a thunderstorm in a hayfield and took refuge under a convenient stack of hay. While waiting for the rain to abate, they talked about the state of the world and the need of people in remote places for the Christian Gospel. After the rain stopped, they formed a circle around the haystack and covenanted with each other to encircle the world with the good news of Christ just as they circled that haystack with their joined hands. Out of their fellowship came the spark that ignited the Protestant missionary movement of the nineteenth century. Together with other movements launched from England and the European continent, it opened up whole sections of the world to Christian evangelism, and did indeed so girdle the

globe with the Gospel that there is virtually no nation under the sun today where the Church does not have a foothold.

This is not to say that the work of Christian missions is done. Far from it! Because of the dilution of its devotion in its expansion, the Church is still only a symbol of what it should be, still as it has always been, a spiritual oasis in a secular desert, and a rather arid oasis at that. Latourette, the historian, describes the advance of the Church as similar to the waves of the sea in an incoming tide. Down through the years the Church has expanded in great waves followed by periods of recession. Yet each recession has been followed by another wave, and each wave has gone farther up on the beach than its predecessor, while each recession has not quite returned to the low point of the one before it. Our century has seen a deep recession come to its final ebb, and the beginnings of a new wave of advance are visible even in the midst of our apprehensive time.

The Church is the Body of Christ

This analogy, first put forward by St. Paul (I Corinthians 12:27 *et al.*), is one of the most beautiful and meaningful figures of speech ever devised to explain a religious mystery. At many, many points it explains the mission of the Church and the abiding vitality of the Christian movement in history.

Any body, if it is alive, is the abiding place and the instrument of a living spirit. Our bodies provide us with mobility and effectiveness. Through our bodies we make our impact on other spirits, by speech, by deeds of love or hate, altruism or greed. What we want done in the material world our bodies must do, and what we want to learn about the cosmos, spiritual or material, we must learn primarily through our bodily senses. Others know us by our bodies and judge us by what our bodies do and by how they ap-

pear. In short, our bodies are our means of fellowship with our physical environment and with other spirits.

In just these ways, the Church must act as the earthly body of Christ. If Christ wants to feed the hungry, he can do it in no way but through his body. If he wants to teach the ignorant or heal the sick or restore the faith of the despairing, he must do it through his body. When his body is broken by division or paralyzed by separation from him or simply asleep, he is as ineffective as any disembodied spirit, and as misunderstood as a man who does things while sleepwalking which he would not do when awake. The responsibility of the Church in this respect is tremendous. This is the source of the great opportunity and the great peril of any company of people who would call themselves a Christian Church: the opportunity to be God's people in this world, the peril that they shall fall under the temptation to usurp God's authority and stand in the way of his will.

The test of the true Church

Here is the only valid test of whether or not a given fellowship is really a true Church. Does the Spirit of Christ (the Holy Spirit) live in it? If Christ does not live in it, if it says and does the things he abhors, if it bears no relationship to him except the appropriation of his name for its title, if it fails to stand for the goals he would stand for, if it is preoccupied with its own material advancement at the expense of the gospel, if it fails to pray as he taught his Church to pray and live as he taught his Church to live, then it is not a Church no matter how orthodox its creeds or how prosperous it may appear by the standards of this world. If, on the other hand, Christ does live in it, if it says what he would say, does what he would do, lives and dies for the Kingdom he proclaimed, then it is a Church no matter how irregular its ritual or its orders or its theology.

Like a body, the Church has many members, all with

differing functions. While St. Paul describes this notion in several places, I Corinthians 12 is the fullest unfolding of the idea. The Church has members with different tasks, different appearance, and different apparent standing, but all mutually dependent upon one another and all under the single head, Christ. As we look about us in the Ecumenical Church, we can thank God that all are not as we, but that in God's providence there are all kinds and descriptions of Christians. As St. Paul says in the chapter mentioned above, "If the whole body were an eye where would be the hearing?" It is apparent that rightly to do its duty a body must have hands and feet as well as a brain, less noble as well as more noble parts.

Christ's body has many parts

In the Body of Christ, those who have called themselves "Fundamentalists" have proclaimed through the waves and ebbs of the Church's popularity, in days when it was respectable and days when it was ridiculous, "It is God's Word, not man's word, that is eternally to be heeded. The search after salvation is man's main business, and it is desperately important business not to be neglected with impunity." While at the same time, at the opposite end of the theological spectrum, the Unitarians have maintained, "God does not require that a man believe that which is not true. Jesus came to bear witness to the truth. God did not give men minds merely so that they could soak up the ideas of their elders. He expects and requires that we shall seek new truth, and heed the voice of reason as well as the voice of faith."

Methodists have proven that even such a living body as the Church must have a skeleton and muscles. With their passion for order and good works they have grown to be the largest Protestant member of the body. And they have shown imagination and courage in new kinds of ministry in social areas untouched by other denominations.

Universalists, while puny in numbers, have continued the Wesleyan emphasis on God's love to its logical conclusion, maintaining that it is without limit, that it does not end with death, that there is no barrier man can build which can forever separate him from his heavenly Father. They affirm that ". . . neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38.39).

The Quakers and Mennonites and their spiritual kinsmen have accepted the obligation to love as a personal duty and have made their deeds of mercy in the name of Jesus a thing of world renown. They have also made a witness to the ever-present availability of the Holy Spirit, and have elevated the divinity of the human conscience to a point where even the laws of the land recognize its inviolability in many instances.

The "holiness" churches such as the Nazarenes and Adventists have kept before us the fact that the Christian life is not complete when the relationship of discipleship is established, but that until *sanctification* has followed *regeneration* the full Christian experience cannot begin. To use the terminology of our first chapter, these people affirm that until the *way* and the *truth* have combined to make the *life* we have an incomplete religion. Their fervor, their devotion, and their willingness to sacrifice material things for their fellowship and the missionary enterprise of their churches puts the rest of us to shame.

The Baptists and the Disciples have not only borne witness to an ancient rite, but have exalted the importance of the mature decision to offer the self to Christ. They have also kept before us the supreme value of the individual soul before God. While disapproving of doctrinal tests for membership and affirming the right of each believer to "work out his own salvation with fear and trembling"

(Philippians 2:12) they have placed great stress on the Church's faith in Christ. Other Protestants also owe them credit for pioneering in the American doctrine of the separation of Church and State.

Presbyterians and others of the Reformed tradition have been steadfast in affirming the historic creeds of the faith, and have set things down in writing in creeds and catechisms. They have contributed intellectual clarity and definiteness to the Gospel which among freer fellowships sometimes becomes vague and formless.

Congregationalists, who pioneered in higher education 200 years ago by founding many of the old "ivy" colleges to insure an educated ministry, and who 150 years ago were the trail blazers in the foreign missionary movement, have in this century become leaders in the ecumenical movement. In city and state councils of churches, and in the National and World councils, they have exerted an influence far beyond the weight of their numbers.

Anglicans, Lutherans, and Roman Catholics have in their various ways preserved the values of the past for the present and the future. By their ancient orders and liturgy, their hymns, their creeds, their continuity, and their stability, they have provided a secure base of operations from which other groups have been able to venture out in new ways, some of which have proven to be good, others bad. These churches have been down through the years the hard core of the Church—too hard and unchanging for those whose tastes have been more prophetic and less priestly—defending against the fads of the day the essentials of the Christian faith. The Episcopalians in particular should be mentioned here as the "bridge church" connecting Protestantism with Catholicism and Orthodoxy, providing whatever hope exists of any future re-establishment of Christian fellowship between the severed branches of Christ's Body.

All these and more who remain unmentioned have made their several contributions to the life of Christ in the modern world. These are together the Body of Christ.

As members of a body there are ways in which they must remain separate, and ways in which separateness is a disaster to the life of the Body. This analogy goes a long way toward clearing up the dispute as to which direction the ecumenical movement should take in striving to foster Christian unity. In the first place, it rules out any thought of a great monolithic Church with one kind of worship and one government. So far as the walls that separate churches are like the membranes of a healthy body which delineate where an arm leaves off and the trunk begins, or where the bloodstream comes up against the digestive tract, it is a good and worthy thing to have such walls. Again, "If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing?" If all the emphases that Christ wants made in this world are to be made, there is a need for more than one kind of church to make them. People have different tastes in worship and there is no good reason why they should not be allowed to worship each in his own way. Also, division of labor is the principle of operation in a healthy body, and it is quite appropriate for Quakers and Unitarians to put all their efforts behind a service program in disaster areas while the Adventists spend most of their energy in evangelism, and some others between these extremes interest themselves in schools and colleges. Christ's Body must have eyes, hands, feet, and everything else or it will be maimed.

From diversity must come unity

But in the second place, there is a sense in which unity is an absolute necessity. This is at the point of common devotion to the Head of the Church and to one another as equally necessary members of the Body. It cannot be denied that the argument for diversity outlined above has been used many times when it did not apply at all. There

are far more divisions in the Church than there need be, and there must be a great effort in the direction of organic union among churches of common faith and purpose to cut down senseless duplication and competition. In other words, Christ's Body ought to be like a human body with two strong arms and two husky legs instead of a Siamese octopus with a score of skinny little tentacles all doing the same thing and getting in each other's way.

Also, even when differences are too great to justify organic union, there must be enough togetherness of purpose to make for common respect among the members of the Body. There are many churches whose official teaching about other churches runs something like this: "I am an eye. You are not an eye. Because you are not an eye you are not of the Body." (See again I Corinthians 12.) This is sin. It gives Christ cerebral palsy so that his Body stumbles and staggers instead of striding steadily against his enemies. He speaks with an uncertain stammer. He strikes weakly in many directions instead of powerfully in a few. Churches who rightly refuse to be ruled by one another must increase their loyalty to their common Lord. If they do this and recognize that diversity is necessary for the proper functioning of a Body, they will render loving honor to all other churches as they seek in their several ways to perform the tasks laid upon them by Christ. While remaining different in doctrine and liturgy all churches must be one in their absolute allegiance to the Master or, indeed, they are "not of the Body." When all the churches—being bound together by a mutual supreme loyalty to Christ and a mutual love and respect for one another as members one of another and of Christ—shall take their places in the Body according to his commands, then the Church will be one and "the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:18).

We meet Christ through the mediation of his body, the Church

There is one more application of the analogy of the Body of Christ which must be made. The body is not only an instrument whereby the soul can know and do what he desires. It is also the means whereby other souls become acquainted with him. Most of what we know about our earthly parents is contained in things we learned through the mediation of their bodies. Mother's cooking, the way Dad worked and played and worshipped, the way they smiled and wept—these are the things we remember, and by them we piece together our knowledge of those people most important of all to our childhood. So it is with our knowledge of Christ; usually what we learn of him we learn because of the Church and its mediation. This is the source of the Roman Catholic doctrine, "There is no salvation outside the Church." It is no more likely that a person will become Christ's apart from the Church than it is likely that one would become acquainted with another person except through the mediation of his body.

This is not true without exception. Anybody can know Jesus as a historical person by reading the Gospels in the New Testament. The deeper, personal knowledge of a disciple is sometimes mysteriously bestowed directly. When Helen Keller was a little, lonely girl, and those who loved her were just beginning to break through the barrier of her deafness and blindness, it was suggested that she be told the story of Jesus. The great preacher, Phillips Brooks, was asked to come and visit the child. He came, and she felt his face with her sensitive fingers as he was introduced to her. Then in simple terms he told her the story of Jesus, the divine man who loved little children, who died and rose again to make us God's people. As his words were interpreted to her by the signs she could understand, tears came to her eyes and began to run down her cheeks. "Oh, thank you!" she said, "I knew him. I knew him already,

but I did not know his name." Even the denial of sight and hearing had not been enough to shut God out of this young life. He had found his way in by means known to Him.

There are not many experiences like this for us to recall. But there are just enough so that we cannot say of any earthly institution, not even of the Church, that it has a monopoly on God's grace. Of course, we could say what some theologians do, that such people are already in the Church and do not know it. In any case, there are not many of them.

It might be said that one can get as good an education at the public library as he can at college if somebody gives him the titles of the books to read. But the fact is that very few ever do. Most people get academic training at schools and colleges. So it is with establishing a proper relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Most people find it in the Church. In the fellowship of worship and study and service that the disciples of Jesus carry on there is an opportunity to know God and receive his grace which is found in no other way. This is particularly true in such acts as baptism and the Lord's Supper rightly understood and administered, regardless of whether they be called "sacraments" or "ordinances." He can truly be "known . . . in the breaking of the bread" (Luke 24:35). We spoke earlier of the power released by the fellowship begun in the upper room. Part of the meaning of the Lord's Supper is that it recreates that fellowship dramatically and connects today's Church with Christ, its Source, its Head, and its Power.

The Church is the Body of Christ. By it he makes his will known and done in the world. Through it we come to know him. And in all this God is praised, his purpose carried out, his loneliness is assuaged, and his Kingdom is extended.

"Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's" (Matthew 22:21)

Ever since the beginning of Jesus' earthly life and even before, people have been wrestling with the issue, "If we are to be subjects in the kingdom of God, what becomes of the earthly kings who are already on the job?" In the story of the Magi (Matthew 2) it will be recalled that Herod was thrown into a cold sweat at the thought of a new king's birth. He was quite content with his lot in life and didn't relish the thought of competition. It was the fear of competition between an earthly and a heavenly king that led to the massacre of the babies of Bethlehem. It was this same fear that provided the pretext for the crucifixion of Jesus, the execution of Paul, and the deaths of a thousand martyrs since then.

This issue has continued to be a matter of concern to Christians down to the present day. Even where the body politic is not a monarchy but a democracy, the relationship between a State which regards itself as sovereign and the Christian who regards himself as under orders from God first and the State second has been a problem in every generation. Because readers of these words will in all probability be citizens of a free country, we will deal primarily with the ways in which a free State relates to the Church and the Kingdom.

The first thing to be said is that it has been proven that in modern times a free Church is absolutely essential to the health and survival of a free State. American democracy, for instance, was a religious institution in the early Congregational and Baptist churches before it became a political institution. In our world today, democracy is strongest in those countries where there is a long and vital tradition of free Protestant Christianity: the Scandinavian countries, Switzerland, the British Dominions, and the United States. It teeters precariously in an irreligious country like France

or in a nation like Italy where the dominant Christian Church is totalitarian in its own political concepts. And it dies or never comes to birth in most other areas.

There are good reasons for this state of affairs. No nation which seeks to maintain "government by the consent of the governed" can succeed in its purpose unless the people do consent to be governed. This may sound elementary, but it is overlooked by a good many political scientists. Unless the people of a nation have a loyalty within themselves which makes them want to obey just laws and abide by majority rule, and unless the majority have character enough to want laws which will be for the total welfare of the total nation, no amount of force can make a free government strong enough to govern. It may be strong enough to keep itself in power, but it then ceases to be the freely elected "choice of the people." This loyalty within themselves and this character come from the exercise of free religion. A man who is voluntarily the subject of God's Kingdom is the only adequate citizen of a democracy.

Democracy has failed in South and Latin America where Protestantism is weak because regimes in power cannot be trusted to hold honest elections when there is a chance they may be ousted from office. That is why we witness a monotonous succession of *coups d'état* until what used to be a continent of republics is now nearer to being a continent of little dictatorships. Democracy has not really come to life in China and Korea because, in spite of the Christian convictions of men like Chiang and Rhee, there have been too few uncorruptible men in the country to make a government. Graft and personal opportunism, which are bad enough in a country with a long Christian tradition, have made democracy impossible in most Oriental countries.

We have been told on many sides that freedom of religion is one of the blessings of democracy. This is stating the facts of the case backwards. The truth of the matter is

that democracy in modern times is one of the blessings of free Christianity.

Strength lies in separation of Church and State

The second point to be stressed is that for the good of both Church and State there should be no organic relationship between them. This is the doctrine of the "separation of Church and State," which was championed early by the Baptists and which has come to be an almost universal conviction among American Protestants. Again, a look at the world scene will demonstrate the validity of this claim. In spite of any well-founded Protestant fears regarding the political ambitions of the Roman Catholic Church on a world scale, it is a well-attested fact that Roman Catholicism in the Anglo-Saxon countries is the most virile and enlightened in the world. This is because for centuries in these areas the Roman Church has been operating in a free religious economy and has had to justify itself without any of the ancient prerogatives of coercion which it has enjoyed in other times and places. Competition has been healthy because, in fighting for life and expansion—not by force of arms but by logic and persuasion—superstition has been discouraged, and teaching relevant to life has been a necessity.

The superiority of the Protestant movement in countries where Church and State are separate is not so readily demonstrable, but at least it can be said that in America, where no tax funds go to churches, the churches are organizationally stronger than in nations where taxes are their support.

The principal evils of marriage between Church and State are two: indifference and oppression. In nations like England, where a tolerant Protestant Church is the State Church, the result is stagnation and apathy. Since the people do not have to labor to keep their Church alive, it becomes like anything else that costs little, a thing to be ignored as insignificant, a sort of museum of ancient his-

tory. At the opposite extreme we note nations like Spain where the totalitarian Roman Catholic Church is the mate of a totalitarian State. In these countries, outright suppression by legal and illegal force is the rule as the Church becomes the enemy of freedom. Lest Protestants become complacent, it should be added that there are abundant instances in history to indicate that a Protestant State Church can also become oppressive.

The State should be the friendly ally of the Church. When St. Paul told the Romans, "Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For . . . those that exist have been instituted by God" (Romans 13:1), he was affirming that usually the laws of the State are based upon the laws of God. Usually, according to St. Paul, the law enforced by Caesar will not conflict with the law of the Kingdom. If that was true in Nero's Rome, how much more true it is likely to be in a modern democracy. This is why the duty to "God and country" can so often be bracketed as one duty, why indeed the patriotism of the nation and the patriotism of the Kingdom often result in the same kinds of good behavior. The common and statute laws of the Anglo-Saxon nations were begun and built up by God-fearing men who owed much to the Holy Scriptures. When we obey "the law of the land," it is usually "the law of the Lord." from which it came originally.

It is just because this is so that we must be constantly on our guard lest we make a false and evil identification between the "kingdom of this world" and "the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." For while they may often say the same things, and our highest prayer for our nation is that they will always say the same things, they are not the same, and the Kingdom of God must always sit in judgment over any national authority. At this point we part company with Roman Catholics who believe that the State should be subject to the Church as an institution. We affirm that the pressure of the Kingdom upon the State must always be

one of spiritual persuasion and personal witness, either by individual Christians or by the Church as a group testifying to its common convictions. No Protestant Church that is true to its principles will ever govern lands or coerce people.

While some may live out their lives and never have occasion to face the issue as to whether to obey Caesar or Christ, there have been millions in our generation who have taken stands in disobedience to the law of the State in the belief that in so doing they were obeying God. Nazism's greatest foe was the Church, first in Germany where Martin Niemueller testified, "God is my Fuehrer," and later in Norway where the Quisling regime found the Church a very tough morsel to digest. In our country, the chief issue has been that of military service. A number of Christians have gone to prison in protest against registration for conscription.

The obligations of a Christian

In this area of thought and action the Christian has two inescapable obligations: first, to examine rationally and prayerfully each questionable issue where it seems that God and the State may differ in the demands they place upon him. After such examination some will decide that Caesar and Christ speak with one voice, others will be convinced that the State has set itself in opposition to the Kingdom. These must honor one another without censure if their Christian convictions are sincere. The second obligation is, without equivocation, to obey the commandment of God in every case.

Christian citizens have a peculiar obligation in a democracy. In ancient times the prayer for divine guidance of the State was always a prayer of intercession for the king. It was ever the prayer of the Christian that his king would be in turn a faithful subject in the Kingdom of God, that his rule might be God's rule and he be God's servant. But

in a democracy the vote and voice of the individual Christian are part of the government. We are kings ourselves and as citizens bear the kingly responsibility. Our duty is to know our government and to bend every effort as individuals and collectively as members of the Church to see that the law of the land is the law of God, and that our nation is a good and loving member of the family of nations.

The Christian who follows Christ, believes in God, and abides in the Holy Spirit is a missionary. As God sent Jesus into the world so Jesus sends the disciple, believing that, bad as the world may be, it is still God's Creation and must fulfill God's Purpose. There is something good, eternally good, that can be done in the world for God and man, and the Christian is sent to do it.

He fulfills his mission by becoming himself a subject in the eternal Kingdom of God, by allowing God to rule in his life and by seeking to extend this rule as widely as he can. In this effort he finds the Church, Christ's Body, the chief instrument and channel of God's grace.

As a Christian citizen he realizes that usually his country's welfare is the Kingdom's welfare, but in all things he recognizes that only Caesar's things are to be paid to Caesar; God's things belong to God!

> "Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name.
> Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven."
>
> —MATTHEW 6:9-10

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *Is the kingdom of God something that happens in this world or does it begin when this world ends?*
2. *How is the Church related to the Kingdom?*
3. *What is our church's function in the Body of Christ?*
4. *In what ways are we contributing to the infirmity of the Body of Christ? To its health?*
5. *What are the absolute minimal requirements that a group must have if it is rightly to be called a church?*
6. *Can a Christian agree with the man who said, "My country, right or wrong, my country!"?*
7. *What do we mean by the "separation of Church and State"? Is it a good thing? Why? Or why not?*
8. *How can Christians best serve their country?*
9. *What are we actually asking for when we pray, "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven"?*

5 *The Christian Trusts an Eternal Promise*

". . . if Christ has not been raised, then . . . your faith is vain.

But in fact Christ has been raised . . . the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.

. . . thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

—I Corinthians 15:14, 20, 57

We now come to the climax of the gospel which is victory over sin *and death.* The ultimate question of human experience is that asked in Job, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14). To this Christianity has never had any answer other than a ringing, "Yes!" We observe as our day of worship not the Hebrew Sabbath which falls on the seventh day of the week, but the Lord's Day, because on that day Christ arose. The resurrection is celebrated every week of the year—too mildly, with not enough excitement, with a great lack of conviction.

The final conclusion of every Christian doctrine is bound up in the eternal promise of God to the faithful, the everlasting covenant of the Most High with his people. Either this promise is valid or God is not the kind of God we think He is. And if the promise is valid, if God is the kind of God in whom Jesus taught us to believe, then our lives ought to be a good deal more radiant than they are.

". . . if Christ, has not been raised . . . (our) faith is vain"

If the life visible here on this earth is all the life there is, then the "good news" of Christianity is a mockery.

We cannot say this without qualification. Even in a world where death is the winner in the end and every life is finally a dismal tragedy, there are some things in the gospel of our Lord and Master that still apply. Love is still the most precious thing in life, and the sacrificial life of him who lays down his life for his friends is beautiful and good. Regardless of the outcome, it is eternally true that justice, prudence, temperance, fortitude, faith, hope, and love are good, and that pride, greed, sloth, lust, and hate are deadly poisons to the soul and body. Even as a wistful hope, Christianity is the best we have.

But after this has been said we must agree with St. Paul in the main. If this early life is all there is, then any belief that "this is our Father's world" is preposterous. If the birth and death of the body are really the beginning and end of human personality, God is either utterly unjust or else a clumsy tinkerer whose creation is completely out of hand.

Even in this event life might be sweet to some. To many in the preferred parts of the world it might be argued that joy and good outweigh sorrow and evil in the balances of life, but for countless millions life would be a black and hopeless calamity. Without the promise of eternal life, what has Christianity to say to slave laborers in Siberia to whom every day is an agony of cold and weariness and fear and hunger and bitter memories? Without the promise, what can Christianity say to the victims of famine and pestilence and war in Europe and Asia whose bodies and minds are broken by wounds and disease and whose chance for earthly happiness has gone by? Without the promise, what can Christianity mean to the aged whose loved ones are gone and who wait for the darkness alone?

Even in wealthy America there are those whose only hope is the eternal promise of Christianity. There is the thirteen-year-old boy in reform school who was born of an illicit love affair between a Caucasian hired girl and an aged Negro boarder on a Maine farm. He has lived in Negro homes and Caucasian homes, in Protestant homes and Catholic homes. He has an I.Q. of 130, plenty of brain power to graduate from Harvard or Yale. But all he has in his heart is a great bitterness and a great hate and a deep cynicism, because he belongs nowhere in this world. There are the "dead end kids" of our city slums, the forgotten American Indians, the sharecroppers and itinerant laborers and all the rest to whom this world offers little opportunity even in this "land of the free and home of the brave."

Without the eternal promise, the Christian Gospel comes down in a heap like an ascension balloon that has lost its gas.

So necessary to human life is the promise of more life that men would and do strive to believe in it, even without the resurrection. Every human group from the most primitive tribe to the most civilized society has its idea of what life after death is like. Burial grounds from Egypt to Arizona are littered with the implements and treasures which the living interred with the dead for their use on the long pilgrimage. Even dogs do not believe in death but live in constant expectation that the sleeping master will return. Only sophisticated moderns believe in death, and sometimes one suspects that their faith is born of the desire for an easy conscience.

The section on "immortality" in any library is the fattest section in the card catalogue. Philosophy, theology, and natural science have all had something to say on the subject. So have fiction and drama and poetry. Some of the ideas are fanciful, others are logical, still others are merely wishful. Plato and Wordsworth sense "intimations" in this life of other existences before and after it. Lodge and other

scientists point to the infallible rule of the conservation of matter and energy in the cosmos and draw an analogy from it to support the theory that, if matter and energy are not wasted, the most precious commodity of all creation, life, must also have a destiny beyond this world. There is the argument from the very need of the soul which points out that there is no hunger in all creation for which creation does not supply a satisfaction. The deer would not pant after the brook if there were no water, because the thirst and water in the brook were made for each other. So, goes the logic, there must be an answer to man's hunger after life. Like the arguments for the existence of God—ontological, teleological, cosmological—the arguments for life after death go on. And they will continue as long as man survives, because faith in the victory of life over death is one of the inevitable parts of human life.

But we read the shelves and shelves of books that seek to bolster faith in life beyond the grave without the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and we are not finally convinced. These arguments can indeed demonstrate that it is far more likely that life is eternal than that death is a final reality. Yet, the mystery remains a mystery at last. Some of the books are courageous, some are pious, some are beautiful and lofty in thought; but when all the arguments are lined up against one another, the leap of faith must still be made —and to believe in death requires just as much a leap of faith as to believe in life!

"But in fact Christ has been raised"

The Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead is the pivotal fact of human history.

We set that sentence out all by itself, stark naked, with a purpose. It has been the practice of middle-of-the-road churchmen to mention this doctrine of the faith once a year, on Easter Sunday, and then a bit apologetically, tucking it in somewhere where it will not be noticed. This is

to sell Christianity short. The Resurrection is not the poetry of fairyland, it is the stuff of real life.

There are two kinds of people who will never believe this, not because it is not so, but because they approach it with ironclad presuppositions which make it impossible for them to believe it. When Dives, the rich man, was simmering in hell and beheld Lazarus, the poor man, in Abraham's bosom, he said, "Father Abraham, send Lazarus to warn my five brothers, that my fate may not be theirs!" Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them." "Ah" said Dives, "but if a messenger went to them from beyond the grave they would repent." "Not so," said Abraham, "if they don't heed Moses and the prophets neither will they listen to one risen from the dead" (Luke 16:19ff.). Abraham is right. Christ did rise and return to mankind from the dead, but the brethren of Dives in all generations have excused themselves from his demands by the simple expedient of refusing to believe he is risen.

The first kind of disbeliever is the ordinary modern materialist who refuses to believe anything foreign to his own little experience. He hails the parson at the drugstore on Saturday of Holy Week and says, "Well, I suppose tomorrow is Easter. It makes me sick. All those thousands of people getting all dolled up to go to church and sing about something they know isn't so!" He knows it isn't so because he never saw anything like it, and obviously if he never saw anything like it it couldn't be so. He is mental kin to the crowds who scoffed at Columbus and touched their heads wisely when the Wright brothers talked about a flying machine. The idea that there might be something unique in history never occurs to him. His imagination atrophied when he was sixteen years old, and he lost the art of wonder when he reached twenty-one.

The second category of skeptics live within the Church itself. They are the spiritual descendants of St. Thomas, the apostle, who could not believe except he be allowed

to place his fingers in the print of the nails and his hand into the spear wound in the side of our Lord's risen body. Only they are not vouchsafed the privilege given Thomas. Many of them are loyal disciples of Jesus on the *way* level. Their motivation in soft-pedalling the Resurrection is sincere. They are concerned that Jesus shall not appear ridiculous in the enlightened modern world, and they seek to interpret Biblical doctrines in terms that will be easy for their contemporaries to believe.

In other instances their efforts to interpret ancient happenings in modern terms are well taken. For instance, the healing of a man with hysterical paralysis by assuring him of God's forgiveness of his sins would be described in different terminology today than in A.D. 28. But it is no less marvelous today than it was when it happened.

In the case of the Resurrection, however, no amount of explaining can fit it into the everyday thought forms of any historical era. The idea that a man should be crucified and the third day rise again was in the first century "a stumbling block to the Jews and folly to the Gentiles" (I Corinthians 1:23). It can never be explained in human terms. As it was said of the Song of Bernadette (a completely different kind of phenomenon), it can be said of the Resurrection, "To those who believe, no explanation is necessary. To those who do not believe, no explanation is possible." But while it cannot be explained it likewise cannot be dismissed as a fact of history. Those who find themselves described by either of the categories outlined above should take another good look at what is known beyond possible dispute about the Resurrection.

There is no account of the actual Resurrection of Jesus in the New Testament. The so-called "Resurrection narratives" are stories of what happened before and after: the crucifixion, the burial in Joseph's tomb, the sealing of the tomb, the visits of the women and the apostles to the empty tomb, the appearances of the risen Christ in the garden, in

Jerusalem, on the road to Emmaus, and by the Sea of Galilee, and the ascension.* Like many Biblical accounts, these do not always agree with one another and are written in language that lends itself to varying interpretations. Here arises another of the fruitless arguments among Christians: Was the risen body of Jesus flesh and blood as described in the scene where Thomas touches it (and elsewhere), or was it a vision such as St. Paul describes in his adventure on the Damascus Road? Or was it one kind of body at one time and other at another? How about the resuscitation theory? These questions will never be conclusively answered, and argument about them has little importance so far as the real issues of the faith are concerned.

Let us draw our conclusions from the known facts

But there are three relevant facts surrounding the Resurrection which no reasonable man can deny. From these facts we must draw our own conclusions as to just what it was that happened before dawn that first Easter day.

1. The disciples were utterly whipped by the crucifixion and burial. All their hopes that Jesus was the Messiah died with him on the cross. When the soldiers arrested him in Gethsemane they scattered to the four winds. Only John and Peter are mentioned at all as being present near the trials before the Jewish Council or Herod or Pilate. Peter made his notorious denials at this time. Most of the disciples were not even present at the crucifixion. After the burial, Peter gave up in bitter disillusionment (John 21:3). "I'm going fishing," he said as he prepared to go back to the life he had led before he met Jesus. Nothing relieved their utter hopelessness and despair on that Saturday when Jesus lay in the tomb. They were despondent, beaten men.

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* See final chapters of Gospels and first four chapters of Acts.

2. A few short weeks later the same Peter and John who cowered on the fringes of the crowd while Jesus was being tried for his life stood before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:5ff.), the same Council of Israel who had compassed the death of Jesus. They wore the same plain up-country clothes they had worn before, and the Council was clad in its pompous finery just as it had been when Jesus stood bound before it in the middle of the night. But these were different men. Instead of cowering they stood erect and defiant. Instead of being terrified they were completely fearless. In direct and forceful terms they warned the rulers of Israel that any action taken against them would be action against their own God who had made the name of Jesus an instrument of healing. So convincing were they that the Council dared not harm them, but released them immediately. And this was only the first of many such instances by which all the disciples gave evidence that far from being beaten they were spokesmen for God, spokesmen who would not be silenced saved by death.

3. The gospel they preached on that day before the Sanhedrin, and the message they proclaimed far and wide while they lived together in Jerusalem or journeyed to other places was a simple three-word sentence, "Jesus is risen!" When Matthias was set aside to be an apostle in the place of Judas, the traitor, his function was made clear, "(He) must become with us a witness to (Jesus') resurrection" (Acts 1:22).

Today, we talk about Jesus as the greatest life teacher who ever lived. We speak of the new way of life he instituted which never was known before. We proclaim the Kingdom of God as a new way of togetherness between man and man, and between man and God. All of these things are true, but none of them would ever have survived the first century if it had not been for that simple yet tremendous message which gave the Church its birth, "Jesus is risen!" The early disciples had many things to

argue about, but one great thing in common. They were men and women who had seen a ghost, yet knew it was not a ghost. Jesus whom they loved and followed and whose death they had mourned was not dead but alive. This was their great life-giving, life-changing gospel.

From these three facts—first, that the disciples were whipped men after the crucifixion, second, that a few short weeks later they were fearless heroes, and third, their explanation of the difference was that Jesus was dead no longer—what possible conclusions can we draw?

One common conclusion advanced by skeptics is that the apostles were liars. This is one of the flimsiest notions ever advanced in disregard of fact. A child will sometimes lie to escape punishment for wrongdoing. Adults often lie to gain advantage for themselves. But no man ever lied simply to get the privilege of being crucified upside down like Peter, or to take upon himself the stern regimen of the rule of God when acceptance of the truth would leave him under the easier rule of men. The conclusion just does not hold water. When a human being gives himself wholeheartedly to a cause, it must be a cause he believes in or his devotion will soon be spent. A communist might believe in distortion of truth as a rational and premeditated policy. But a bosom friend of Jesus of Nazareth to whom truth was a holy thing could not in forty-eight hours become a cynical liar. The concept that the Resurrection was a story invented by the apostles in a calculated effort to deceive the world will not stand up in the light of the known facts. The Church was not founded upon a lie.

A second explanation often advanced is that the apostles were hysterical visionaries. So great was their grief, the story goes, that the vision of the risen Christ became a projection of their own terrible longing, and they thought they saw him and they thought he spoke to them after his death. This is a less fantastic allegation than the lie theory. The line between spiritual genius and madness is always a thin

one. One wonders if Isaiah, Jesus, Paul, St. Francis, Joan of Arc, and others of their ilk would not all be clapped into a mental hospital in this age when all imagination is disparaged. Certainly, Jesus' own family thought at times that he was insane. But even granting this much, this idea does not fit the facts any more than does the other. The disciples were beaten and downcast at the time of the burial of Jesus, but there is no indication that they were hysterical. Also, it is to be noted that they received the first news of the Resurrection with a very cool skepticism of their own. They would have liked to believe the story of the women who went early to the tomb, but being reasonable men, they could not at first accept the unsubstantiated story of these members of the more emotional sex. To explain away the absolute certitude of the apostles and scores of lesser disciples who later testified that Jesus had appeared among them by calling it hysteria is the proposal of one who seeks an explanation for something that cannot be explained. Naturally, when one sees a ghost an enthusiasm approaching hysteria is likely to result. But here the facts are reversed. The vision was not the result of the excitement; rather, the excitement was the result of the vision.

By far the most reasonable explanation of the three chief facts cited is that somehow Jesus Christ made his presence known to his friends after his death. That fact reversed their lives from utter despair to complete, fearless faith. It also became the pivotal fact of history.

Napoleon returned to France for one hundred days after his exile to Elba. Students of history would be hard put to it to prove this absolutely after so many years. But he did return, did rule, did fight battles, and, after Waterloo, he was exiled again and finally to St. Helena. Jesus Christ returned to his disciples after his death. Whether it was for a few weeks, as the Church has long taught, is not an essential point. Neither is it essential to describe with exact and detailed finality the nature of his return. The fact is

that he did return, and his return is much more attested as a fact of history than is the return of Napoleon from Elba. Not only was it affirmed by "many proofs" (Acts 1:3) at the time, but millions who never heard of Napoleon's return are personally in touch with God today because Jesus arose from the dead.

Let us be as scientific as we will in seeking out the truth. Let us doubt that which seems doubtful to us if such is our bent. But that which changed the disciples from whipped men into world-conquering saints they called the Resurrection. By whatever name we choose to call it (and we know no better) it is the hinge on which history swings.

". . . thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ"

So finally, as Jesus is the way and truth of our life and death he is also the way and truth of our resurrection. The field of the argument is shifted. All the attempts to justify belief in immortality through philosophy and science are like trying to study Beethoven by dissecting the instruments of the orchestra. Any attempt to unravel the final mystery of man's destiny and his reason for being, simply by studying man, must end short of its goal. But when we have established the fact of the Resurrection of Jesus, a new dimension is added. We can now reason not only from our knowledge of man but from our knowledge of God, who reaches through to us in the risen Christ.

We remember many years ago attending a missionary service on a small island off the coast of Maine. It was an evening service, and afterward we had to return by rowboat to the little vessel operated by the Maine Seacoast Mission in which we had come. It was anchored off in the harbor. As we pushed away from the dock we noticed that a wind had sprung up and whitecaps were already appearing between us and our destination. Out in the harbor was a line of little white lights zig-zagging from one side to the

other. Some of these were on small fishing boats, some were markers, one (we could not tell which in the dark) was the vessel where we wanted to spend the night. As we rowed we became apprehensive. The wind became stronger and it became imperative that we know which light to steer for. If we went too far to one side we might hit a projecting rock. If we went too far to the other side we would be out of the harbor and the wind would make it hard if not impossible to keep from being carried out to sea. It was not an easy choice to make. The lights in the harbor all looked alike. One of them, we knew, meant a good hot cup of coffee and a friendly hour with the crew before a snug bunk and sleep. All the others meant at best more cold spray and danger. Meanwhile, the wind increased and we began to bail as water started to splash in over the gunwhales.

Just as our apprehension began to change to fear, something happened that made everything all right. The engineer on the vessel toward which we were rowing became a little concerned because we had not arrived. He went up into the pilot house and turned on the searchlight. The great white finger shot out over the waves to the dock where we had left our boat, and the man whose hand was on the handle of the light noticed that the boat was gone. Then the light went roaming over the harbor until it picked us out and made a bright little circle right around us. What before had been just another light among many was now *the* light that illuminated the whole harbor. What before had been an invisible path across trackless water was now a shimmering highway. The whitecaps were still there spanking our little boat, but the apprehension was gone. We rowed home singing.

The hopes of men are little lights that look a great deal alike in the darkness. But when the Resurrection penetrates our consciousness, a great searchlight in heaven is turned on. We then believe our hopes are true not because of men

but because of God. We sail with a new confidence from that day on—no longer are we like Columbus sailing out into the darkness, for our goal is reaching out to us.

In life and death we are in God's care

What will heaven be like? Only two things are essential in our gropings after an answer to this question. The first is the Christian affirmation that all that is good in our personality survives. This is what is meant by the doctrine of the resurrection of the body in the Apostles' Creed. The Hebrew-Christian tradition has never taught a concept of disembodied existence. This does not mean that resurrection is a mechanical reassembly of the old body. The 15th chapter of First Corinthians sets forth the idea of St. Paul that just as God gives a new body to the seed that dies after being planted so He will give us a new body "as it pleases Him." Human personality is soul and body, and just as Jesus was able to make himself known to the faithful after his Resurrection through their bodily senses so we shall know one another after we have entered into that same resurrection. This is no more marvelous than our creation in the first place. We leave the details to God. It is his business.

The second essential regarding the future life is that it will be different from this. This is clear in the few statements regarding it that we find in the teachings of Jesus. While personality, total personality, survives, it is also true that it will go on growing and changing. As men we are the same persons we were when we were boys. So in the future life we will be the same persons, but different as men are different from boys or women from girls.

Beyond this we have a free license to use our imagination as the writers of the Bible and other great literature have used theirs. But let us not despise one another for our differences of opinion about questions which will not be answered finally until time ends.

The greatest change wrought by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is the difference it makes in the life that is lived in this world. It has been called "the blow that broke the back of history." Without it it is impossible to imagine how the Christian Church would ever have come to be. The Church began as a society of the witnesses of the Resurrection, and it has continued down through the years as a concrete expression of the continued life of Jesus Christ. That is why it is so appropriate to call it his Body. Seek out the meaning of any event, any movement, any institution, and the threads all lead to the Resurrection as the strands of a spider's web all lead to the center.

The Resurrection overturns the value judgments of the world, making free things precious and dear things worthless. One day a man and his wife who were both successful writers of fiction got some bad news. They were a devoted couple and had lived together more than a score of years enjoying all that this world has to give in the way of sensate pleasure. Now it was revealed to them that the wife had cancer in a place where it could not be cured by any medical means. After receiving the news they went to their lovely home and committed suicide. This was a completely reasonable thing to do, granting their basic beliefs about life. They had had a good life together, and since they believed that this life is all the life there is, and that pleasure is the greatest good and pain the greatest evil, nothing could make more sense than to quit while they were ahead. Many, many more believe as they did but do not have the courage of their convictions.

But the Resurrection makes their action not only a cowardly surrender in the face of the enemy but a crime against the God who made man for a nobler purpose than pleasure and who sees the eternal good that lies dormant in present evil.

The most thrilling tales of history are the accounts that tell of God's lonely man standing out against the crowd.

Moses in the court of Pharaoh, Amos at Bethel, Nathan before David, Jesus before Pilate, Paul before Agrippa, Luther before the Diet of Worms—these and a thousand more have spoken for God to man and have trusted the Most High to save them. Sometimes they escaped with their lives. More often they were crucified or stoned or hanged or burned at the stake. But the Resurrection makes God's lonely man a majority of one wherever he stands and no matter how many vote against him. Because of the Resurrection, life is not a blind alley, a dead end street, but it is a through highway to the eternity of the living God of goodness and of love.

The Christian who follows Christ, believes in God, abides in the Holy Spirit, and serves the Church and the Kingdom also trusts an eternal promise. This promise is based squarely on the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, a fact which "broke the back of history."

In Dorothy Clarke Wilson's novel, *The Brother,* James is asked if he has seen the risen Jesus. His answer can be yours and mine:

"Yes," he said, "I looked into the face of my enemy, whom I hated, and when I had spoken to him words of pity and forgiveness, behold it was my Brother's face. And I have heard him speak. For when I turned aside from my journey to help a stranger lying by the roadside, it was my Brother's voice who called to me. And I have touched him. For when I saw a slave stumbling beneath a heavy burden and reached out to help him, the hand that I clasped was my Brother's hand."

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. *What do you think of the wisdom of the man who says, "This world is trouble enough. I'll worry about the next one when it comes—*if *it comes!"?*
2. *What are the facts surrounding the Resurrection that no reasonable person can doubt?*
3. *In the light of these facts do you think Jesus really arose from the dead?*
4. *If Jesus did not arise, what is your explanation of the events that transpired between Good Friday and the Day of Pentecost?*
5. *If Jesus did arise how would you describe the Resurrection?*
6. *What is the difference between the Resurrection and other arguments advanced to justify belief in immortality?*
7. *What relation does the discussion of the Resurrection have to discussion of other teachings of Christianity?*
8. *What is God's eternal promise to the Christian?*

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